TALES BY POLISH AUTHORS

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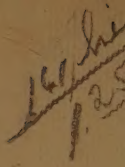

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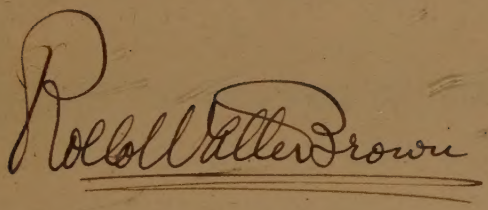

TALES BY POLISH AUTHORS

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TALES

BY

POLISH AUTHORS

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ
STEFAN ŻEROMSKI ADAM SZYMAŃSKI
WACŁAW SIEROSZEWSKI

TRANSLATED BY

ELSE C. M. BENECKE

Oxford
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1915

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Of the contemporary Polish authors represented in this volume only Henryk Sienkiewicz is well known in England. Although the works of Stefan Żeromski, Adam Szymański, and Wacław Sieroszewski are widely read in Poland, none have as yet appeared in English, so far as the present translator is aware. 'Srul—from Lubartów' is generally considered one of the most striking of Adam Szymański's Siberian 'Sketches.' The author writes from personal experience, having himself been banished to Siberia for a number of years. The same can be said of Wacław Sieroszewski; during the fifteen years spent in Siberia as a political exile, he made a study of some of the native tribes, especially the Yakut and Tungus, and has written a great deal on this subject. Stefan Żeromski is also one of the most distinguished modern Polish novelists; several of his books have been translated into French and German.

The translator is under a deep obligation to the authors, MM. Sienkiewicz, Szymański, and Żeromski, for kindly allowing her to publish these tales in English, and to Mr. J. H. Retinger, Secretary of the Polish Bureau in London, for authorising the same on behalf of M. Sieroszewski.

E. C. M. B.

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POLISH PRONUNCIATION:

After k, rz = English sh.
sz = English sh
cz = ,, ch
ł = ,, w
w = ,, v

BARTEK THE CONQUEROR

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

CHAPTER I

MY hero's name was Bartek Słowik[1]; but owing to his habit of staring when spoken to, the neighbours called him 'Bartek Goggle-Eyes.' Indeed, he had little in common with nightingales, and his intellectual qualities and truly childish *naïveté* won him the further nickname of 'Bartek the Blockhead.' This last was the most popular, in fact, the only one handed down to history, though Bartek bore yet a fourth, —an official—name. Since the Polish words 'man' and 'nightingale'[2] present no difference to a German ear, and the Germans love to translate Barbarian Proper names into a more cultured language in the cause of civilization, the following conversation took place when he was being entered as a recruit.

'What is your name?' the officer asked Bartek.

1 Nightingale. 2 'Człowiek' and 'Słowik.'

'Słowik.'

Szloik[1] *Ach, ja, gut.'*

And the officer wrote down 'Man.'

Bartek came from the village of Pognębin, a name given to a great many villages in the Province of Posen and in other parts of Poland. First of all there was he himself, not to mention his land, his cottage and two cows, his own piebald horse, and his wife, Magda. Thanks to this combination of circumstances he was able to live comfortably, and according to the maxim contained in the verse:

> To him whom God would bless He gives, of course,
> A wife called Magda and a piebald horse.

In fact, all his life he had taken whatever Providence sent without troubling about it. But just now Providence had ordained war, and Bartek was not a little upset at this. For news had come that the Reserves would be called up, and that it would be necessary to leave his cottage and land, and entrust it all to his wife's care. People at Pognębin were poor enough already. Bartek usually worked at the factory in the winter and helped his household on in this way;—but what would happen now? Who could know when the war with the French would end?

[1] 'Człowiek' (man).

Magda, when she had read through the papers, began to swear:

'May they be damned and die themselves! May they be blinded!—Though you are a fool—yet I am sorry for you. The French give no quarter; they will chop off your head, I dare say.'

Bartek felt that his wife spoke the truth. He feared the French like fire, and was sorry for himself on this account. What had the French done to him? What was he going after there,—why was he going to that horrible strange land where not a single friendly soul was to be found? He knew what life at Pognębin was like,—well, it was neither easy nor difficult, but just such as it was. But now he was being told to go away, although he knew that it was better to be here than anywhere else. Still, there was no help for it;—such is fate. Bartek embraced his wife, and the ten-year old Franek; spat, crossed himself, and went out of the cottage, Magda following him. They did not take very tender leave of one another. They both sobbed, he repeating, 'Come, come, hush!' and went out into the road. There they realized that the same thing which had happened to them had happened to all Pognębin, for the whole village was astir, and the road was obstructed by traffic. As they walked to the station, women, children, old men and dogs followed them. Everyone's heart was heavy;

but a few smoked their pipes with an air of indifference, and some were already intoxicated. Others were singing with hoarse voices :

> Skrzynecki[1] died, alas !
> No more his voice is heard ;
> His hand, bedeckt with rings,
> No more shall wield the sword,'

while one or two of the Germans from Pognębin sang ' Die Wacht am Rhein ' out of sheer fright. All that motley and many-coloured crowd,— including policemen with glittering bayonets,— moved in file towards the end of the village with shouts, bustle, and confusion. Women clung to their ' warriors' ' necks and wept; one old woman showed her yellow teeth and waved her arms in the air ; another cried : ' May the Lord remember our tears !' There were cries of : ' Franek ! Kaśka ! Józek ! good-bye !' Dogs barked, the church bell rang, the priest even said the prayers for the dying, since not one of those now going to the station would return. The war had claimed them all, but the war would not give them back. The plough would grow rusty in the field, for Pognębin had declared war against the French. Pognębin could not acquiesce in the supremacy of Napoleon III, and took to heart the question of the Spanish succession. The last sounds of the bell hovered over the crowd, which

[1] A popular song. Skrzynecki was a well-known leader in the Polish Revolution of 1863.

was already falling out of line. Heads were bared as they passed the shrine. The light dust rose up from the road, for the day was dry and fine Along both sides of the road the ripening corn, heavy in the ear, rustled and bowed in the gentle gusts of wind. The larks were twittering in the blue sky, and each warbled as if fearing he might be forgotten.

At the station there was a still greater crowd, and more noise and confusion! Here were men called in from Krzywda Gorna, Krzywda Dolna, from Wywłaszczyniec, from Niedola, and Mizerów. The station walls were covered with proclamations in which war was declared in the Name of God and the Fatherland: the 'Landwehr' was setting forth to defend menaced parents, wives and children, cottages and fields. It was evident that the French bore a special grudge against Pognębin, Krzywda Gorna, Krzywda Dolna, Wywłaszczyniec, Niedola, and Mizerów. Such, at least, was the impression produced on those who read the placards. Fresh crowds were continually assembling in front of the station. In the waiting-room the smoke from the men's pipes filled the air, and hid the placards. It was difficult to make oneself understood in the noise, for everyone was running, shouting, and screaming. On the platform orders were given in German. They sounded strangely brief, harsh, and decisive.

The bell rang. The powerful breath of the engine was heard in the distance coming nearer,—growing more distinct. With it the war itself seemed to be coming nearer.

A second bell,—and a shudder ran through every heart. A woman began to scream. ' Jadom, Jadom !' She was evidently calling to her Adam, but the other women took up the word and cried, ' Jadą.'[1] A shrill voice among them added : ' The French are coming !' and in the twinkling of an eye a panic seized not only the women, but also the future heroes of Sedan. The crowd swerved. At that moment the train entered the station. Caps and uniforms were seen to be at all the windows. Soldiers seemed to swarm like ants. Dark, oblong bodies of cannon showed grimly on some of the trucks, on others there was a forest of bayonets. The soldiers had, apparently, been ordered to sing, for the whole train shook with their strong masculine voices. Strength and power seemed in some way to issue from that train, the end of which was not even in sight.

The Reservists on the platform began to fall in, but anyone who could lingered in taking leave. Bartek swung his arms as if they were the sails of a windmill, and stared.

' Well, Magda, good-bye !'

[1] ' They are going.' ' Jadom ' and ' jadą ' are pronounced similarly.

'Oh, my poor fellow!'

'You will never see me again!'

'I shall never see you again!'

'There's no help for it!'

'May the Mother of God protect and shelter you!'

'Good-bye. Take care of the cottage.'

The woman embraced him in tears.

'May God guide you!'

The last moment had come. The whistle and the women's crying and sobbing drowned everything else. 'Good-bye! Good-bye!' But the soldiers were already separated from the motley crowd, and formed a dark, solid mass, moving forward in square columns with the certainty and regularity of clockwork. The order was given: 'Take your seats!' Columns and squares broke asunder from the centre, marched with heavy strides towards the carriages, and jumped into them. The engine, now breathing like a dragon and exhaling streams of vapour, sent forth wreaths of grey smoke. The women cried and sobbed still louder; some of them hid their eyes with their handkerchiefs, others waved their hands towards the carriages; sobbing voices repeated the name of husband and son.

'Good-bye, Bartek!' Magda cried from amongst them. 'Take care of yourself!—May the Mother of God—Good-bye! Oh, God!—'

'And take care of the cottage,' answered Bartek.

The line of trucks suddenly trembled, the carriages knocked against one another,—and went forward.

'And remember you have a wife and child,' Magda cried, running after the train. 'Good-bye, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! Good-bye ——'

On went the train, faster and faster, bearing away the warriors of Pognębin, of both Krzywdas, of Niedola, and Mizerów.

CHAPTER II

MAGDA, with the crowd of women, returned crying to Pognębin in one direction; in the other the train, bristling with bayonets, rushed into the grey distance, and Bartek with it. There seemed to be no end to the long cloud of smoke; Pognębin was also scarcely visible. Only the lime-tree showed faintly, and the church tower, glistening as the rays of the sun played upon it. Soon the lime-tree also disappeared, and the gilt cross resembled a shining speck. As long as that speck continued to shine Bartek kept his eyes fixed upon it, but when that vanished too there were no bounds to the poor fellow's grief. A sense of great weakness came over him and he felt lost. So he began to look at the Sergeant, for, after the Almighty, he already felt there was no one greater than he. The Sergeant clearly knew what would become of Bartek now; he himself knew nothing, understood nothing. The Sergeant sat on the bench, and, supporting his rifle between his knees, he lighted his pipe. The

smoke rose in clouds, hiding his grave, discontented face from time to time. Not Bartek's eyes alone watched his face; all the eyes from every corner of the carriage were watching it. At Pognębin or Krzywda every Bartek or Wojtek was his own master, each had to think about himself, and for himself, but now the Sergeant would do this for him. He would command them to look to the right, and they would look to the right; he would command them to look to the left, and they would look to the left. The question, 'Well, and what is to become of us?' stood in each man's eyes, but he knew as much as all of them put together, and also what was expected of them. If only one were able by glances to draw some command or explanation from him! But the men were afraid to ask direct, as war was now drawing near with all the chances of being court-martialled. What was permitted and was not permitted, and by whom, was unknown. They, at least, did not know, and the sound of such a word as 'Kriegsgericht,' though they did not understand it, frightened them very much.

They felt that this Sergeant had still more power over them now than at the manœuvres in Posen; he it was who knew everything, and without him nothing would be done. He seemed meanwhile to be finding his rifle growing heavy, for he pushed it towards Bartek to hold for him.

Bartek reached out hastily for it, held his breath, stared, and looked at the Sergeant as he would at a rainbow, yet derived little comfort from that. Ah, there must surely be bad news, for even the Sergeant looked worried. At the stations one heard singing and shouting; the Sergeant gave orders, bustled about and swore, as if to show his importance. But let the train once move on, and everyone, including himself, was silent. Owing to him the world now seemed to wear two aspects, the one clear and intelligible—that represented by home and family—the other dark, yes, absolutely dark—that of France and war. He effectually revived the spirits of the Pognębin soldiers, not so much by his personality, as that each man carried him at the back of his mind. And since each soldier carried his knapsack on his shoulder, with his cloak and other warlike accoutrements, the whole load was extremely heavy.

All the while the train was shaking, roaring, and rushing along into space. Now a station where they added fresh carriages and engines; now another where helmets, cannon, horses, bayonets, and companies of Lancers were to be seen. The fine evening drew in slowly. The sun sank in a deep crimson, and a number of light flying clouds spread from the edge of the darkening sky across to the west. The train, stopping frequently at the stations to pick up passengers

and carriages, shook and rushed forward into that crimson brightness, as into a sea of blood. From the open carriage, in which Bartek and the Pognębin troops were seated, one could see villages, hamlets and little towns, church steeples, storks—looking like hooks, as they stood on one leg on their nests,—isolated cottages, and cherry orchards. Everything was passed rapidly, and everything looked crimson. Meanwhile the soldiers, growing bolder, began to whisper to one another, because the Sergeant, having laid his kit bag under his head, had fallen asleep, with his clay pipe between his teeth. Wojtek Gwizdała, a peasant from Pognębin, sitting beside Bartek, jogged his elbow: 'Bartek, listen!'

Bartek turned a face with pensive, wide open eyes towards him.

'Why do you look like a calf going to be slaughtered?' Gwizdała whispered. 'True, you, poor beggar, are going to be slaughtered, that's certain!'

'Oh, my word!' groaned Bartek.

'Are you afraid?' Gwizdała asked.

'Why shouldn't I be afraid?'

The crimson in the sky was growing deeper still, so Gwizdała pointed towards it and went on whispering:

'Do you see that brightness? Do you know, Blockhead, what that is? That's blood. Here's

Poland,—our frontier, say,—do you understand? But there in the distance, where it's so bright, that's France itself.'

'And shall we be there soon?'

'Why are you in such a hurry? They say that it's a terribly long way. But never fear, the French will come out to meet us.'

Bartek's Pognębin brain began to work laboriously. After some moments he asked: 'Wojtek.'

'Yes?'

'What sort of people are these Frenchmen?

Here Wojtek's wisdom suddenly became aware of a pitfall into which it might be easier to tumble headforemost than to come out again. He knew that the French were the French. He had heard something about them from old people, who had related that they were always fighting with everyone; he knew at least that they were very strange people. But how could he explain this to Bartek to make him understand how strange they were? First of all, therefore, he repeated the question, 'What sort of people?'

'Why, yes.'

Now there were three nations known to Wojtek: living in the centre were the Poles; on the one side were the Russians, on the other the Germans. But there were various kinds of Germans. Preferring, therefore, to be clear rather than accurate, he said:

'What sort of people are the French? How can I tell you; they must be like the Germans, only worse.'

At which Bartek exclaimed: 'Oh, the low vermin!'

Up to that time he had had one feeling only with regard to the French, and that was a feeling of unspeakable fear. Henceforth this Prussian Reservist cherished the hatred of a true patriot towards them. But not feeling quite clear about it all, he asked again: 'Then Germans will be fighting Germans?'

Here Wojtek, like a second Socrates, chose to adopt a simile, and answered:

'But doesn't your dog, Łysek, fight with my Burek?'

Bartek opened his mouth and looked at his instructor for a moment: 'Ah! true.'

'And the Austrians are Germans,' explained Wojtek, 'and haven't they fought against us? Old Swierzcz said that when he was in that war Steinmetz used to shout: "On, boys, at the Germans!" Only that's not so easy with the French.'

'Good God!'

'The French have never been beaten in any war. When they attack you, don't be afraid, don't disgrace yourself. Each man is worth two or three of us, and they wear beards like Jews.

There are some as dark as the devil. Now that you know what they are like, commend yourself to God!'

'Well, but then why do we run after them?' Bartek asked in desperation.

This philosophical remark was possibly not as stupid as it appeared to Wojtek, who, evidently influenced by official opinion, quickly had his answer ready.

'I would rather not have gone myself, but if we don't run after them, they will run after us. There's no help for it. You have read what the papers say. It's against us peasants that they bear the chief grudge. People say that they have their eyes on Poland, because they want to smuggle vodka out of the country, and the Government won't allow it, and that's why there's war. Now do you understand?'

'I cannot understand,' Bartek said resignedly.

'They are also as greedy for our women as a dog for a bone,' Wojtek continued.

'But surely they would respect Magda, for example?'

'They don't even respect age!'

'Oh!' cried Bartek in a voice implying, 'If that is so then I will fight!'

In fact this seemed to him really too much. Let them continue to smuggle vodka out of

Poland,—but let them dare to touch Magda! Our friend Bartek now began to regard the whole war from the standpoint of his own interests, and took courage in the thought of how many soldiers and cannon were going out in defence of Magda, who was in danger of being outraged by the French. He arrived at the conviction that there was nothing for it but to go out against them.

Meanwhile the brightness had faded from the sky, and it had grown dark. The carriages began to rock violently on the uneven rails, and the helmets and bayonets shook from right to left to the rhythm of the rocking. Hour after hour passed by. Millions of sparks flew from the engine and crossed one another in the darkness, serpentining in long golden lines. For a while Bartek could not sleep. Like those sparks in the wind, thoughts leapt into his mind about Magda, about Pognębin, the French and the Germans. He felt that though he would have liked to have lain down on the bench on which he was sitting, he could not do so. He fell asleep, it is true, but it was a heavy, unrefreshing sleep, and he was at once pursued by dreams. He saw his dog, Łysek, fighting with Wojtek's Burek, till all their hair was torn off. He was running for a stick to stop them, when suddenly he saw something else: sitting with his arm round Magda was a dark Frenchman, as dark as the earth; but Magda

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was smiling contentedly. Some Frenchmen jeered at Bartek, and pointed their fingers at him. In reality it was the engine screaming, but it seemed to him that the French were calling, 'Magda! Magda! Magda!' 'Hold your tongue, thieves,' Bartek shouted, 'leave my wife alone!' but they continued calling 'Magda! Magda! Magda!' Łysek and Burek started barking, and all Pognębin cried out, 'Don't let your wife go!' Was he bound, or what was the matter? No, he rushed forward, tore at the cord and broke it, seized the Frenchman by the head,—and suddenly—!

Suddenly he was seized with severe pain, as from a heavy blow. Bartek awoke and dragged his feet to the ground. The whole carriage awoke, and everyone asked, 'What has happened?' In his sleep the unfortunate Bartek had seized the Sergeant by the head. He stood up immediately, as straight as a fiddle-string, two fingers at his forehead; but the Sergeant waved his hand, and shouted like mad:

'Ach, Sie! beast of a Pole! I'll knock all the teeth out of your head,—blockhead!'

The Sergeant shouted until he was hoarse with rage, and Bartek stood saluting all the while. Some of the soldiers bit their lips in order not to laugh, but they were half afraid, too. A parting shot burst forth from the Sergeant's lips:

'You Polish Ox! Ox from Podolia!'

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Ultimately everything became quiet again. Bartek sat back in his old place. He was conscious of nothing but that his cheek was swollen, and, as if playing him a trick, the engine kept repeating :

'Magda ! Magda ! Magda !'

He felt a heavy weight of sorrow upon him.

CHAPTER III

IT was morning!

The fitful, pale light fell on faces sleepy and worn with a long restless night. The soldiers were sleeping in discomfort on the seats, some with their heads thrown forward, others with their noses in the air. The dawn was rising and flooding all the world with crimson light. The air was fresh and keen. The soldiers awoke. The morning rays were drawing away shadows and mist into some region unknown. Alas! and where was now Pognębin, where Great and Little Kzrywda, where Mizerów? Everything was strange and different. The summits of the hills were overgrown with trees; in the valleys were houses hidden under red roofs, with dark crucifixes on the white walls,—beautiful houses like mansions, covered with vines. Here, churches with spires, there, factory chimneys with wreaths of purple smoke. There were only straight lines, level banks, and fields of corn. The inhabitants swarmed like ants. They passed villages and towns, and the train went through a number of unimportant stations without stopping. Something must have happened, for there were crowds

to be seen everywhere. When the sun slowly began to appear from behind the hills, one or two of the soldiers commenced saying a prayer aloud. Others followed their example, and the first rays of splendour fell on the men's earnest, devout faces.

Meanwhile the train had stopped at a larger station. A crowd of people immediately surrounded it: news had come from the seat of war. Victory! Victory! Telegrams had been arriving for several hours. Everyone had anticipated defeat, so when roused by the unexpected news, their joy knew no bounds. People rushed half-clad from their houses and their beds, and ran to the post-office. Flags were waving from the roofs, and handkerchiefs from everyone's hands. Beer, tobacco and cigars were carried to the carriages. The enthusiasm was unspeakable; everyone's face was beaming. 'Die Wacht am Rhein' filled the air continuously like a tempest. Not a few were weeping, others embraced one another. The enthusiasm animating the crowd imparted itself to the gallant soldiers, their courage rose, and they too began to sing. The carriages trembled with their strong voices, and the crowd listened in wonder to their unintelligible songs. The men from Pognębin sang:

'Bartoszu! Bartoszu! never lose hope!'

'The Poles, the Poles!' repeated the crowd by

way of explanation, and, gathering round the carriages, admired their soldierly bearing, and added to their joy by relating anecdotes of the remarkable courage of these Polish Regiments.

Bartek had unshaven cheeks, which, in addition to his yellow moustache, goggle-eyes, and large bony face, made him look terrifying. They gazed at him as at some wild beast. These, then, were the men who were to defend Germany ! Such were they who had just disposed of the French ! Bartek smiled with satisfaction, for he too was pleased that they had beaten the French. Now they would not go to Pognębin, they would not make off with Magda, nor capture his land. So he smiled, but as his cheek hurt him badly, he made a grimace at the same time, and did certainly look terrifying. Then, displaying the appetite of a Homeric warrior, he caused pea-sausages and pints of beer to disappear into his mouth as into a vacuum. People in the crowd gave him cigars and pence, and they all drank to one another.

'There's some good in this German nation,' he said to Wojtek, adding after a moment, 'and you know they have beaten the French !'

But Wojtek, the sceptic, cast a shadow on his joy. Wojtek had forebodings, like Cassandra :

'The French always allow themselves to be beaten at first, in order to take you in, and then they set to until they have cut you to pieces !'

Wojtek did not know that the greater part of Europe shared his opinion, in general, and in particular now.

They travelled on. All the houses were covered with flags. They stopped a long while at several of the stations, because there was a block of trains everywhere. Troops were hastening from all sides of Germany to reinforce their brothers in arms. The trains were swathed in green wreaths, and the Lancers had decorated their lances with the bunches of flowers given them on the way. The majority of these Lancers also were Poles. More than one conversation and greeting was heard passing from carriage to carriage :

' How are you, old fellow, and where is God Almighty leading you?'

Meanwhile to the accompaniment of the train rumbling along the rails, the well-known song rang out :—

' Flirt with us, soldiers ! dears ! '
Cried the girls of Sandomierz.

And soon Bartek and his comrades caught up the refrain :—

Gaily forth the answer burst :
' Bless you, dears ! but dinner first ! '

As many as had gone out from Pognębin in sorrow were now filled with enthusiasm and spirit. A train which had arrived from France with the first batch of wounded, damped this feeling of cheerfulness, however. It stopped at Deutz, and

waited a long time to allow the trains hurrying to the seat of war to go by. The men were marched across the bridge *en route* for Cologne. Bartek ran forward with several others to look at the sick and wounded. Some lay in closed, others in open carriages, and these could be seen well. At the first glance our hero's heart was again in his mouth.

'Come here, Wojtek,' he cried in terror. 'See how many of our countrymen the Frenchmen have done for!'

It was indeed a sight! Pale, exhausted faces, some darkened by gunpowder or by pain, or stained with blood. To the sounds of universal rejoicing these men only responded by groans. Some were cursing the war, the French and the Germans. Parched lips called every moment for water, eyes rolled in delirium. Here and there, amongst the wounded, were the rigid faces of the dead, in some cases peaceful, with blue lines round their eyes, in others contorted through the death struggle, with terrifying eyes and grinning teeth. Bartek saw the bloody fruits of war for the first time, and once more confusion reigned in his mind. He seemed quite stupefied, as, standing in the crowd, with his mouth open, he was elbowed from every side, and pomelled on the neck by the police. He sought Wojtek's eyes, nudged him, and said,

'Wojtek, may Heaven preserve us! It's horrible!'

'It will be just the same with you.'

'Jesu! Mary! That human beings should murder one another like this! When a fellow kills another the police take him off to the magistrate and prison!'

'Well, but now whoever kills most human beings is to be praised. What were you thinking of, Blockhead: did you think you would use gunpowder as in the manœuvres, and would shoot at targets instead of people.?'

Here the difference between theory and practice certainly stood out clearly. Notwithstanding that our friend Bartek was a soldier, had attended manœuvres and drill, had practised rifle shooting, had known that the object of war was to kill people, now, when he saw blood flowing, and all the misery of war, it made him feel so sick and miserable he could hardly keep himself upright. He was impressed anew with respect for the French; this diminished, however, when they arrived at Cologne from Deutz. At the Central Station they saw prisoners for the first time. Surrounding them was a number of soldiers and people, who gazed at them with interest, but without hostility. Bartek elbowed his way through the crowd, and, looking into the carriage, was amazed.

A troop of French infantry in ragged cloaks, small, dirty, and emaciated, were packed into the carriages like a cask of herrings. Many of them stretched out their hands for the trifling gifts presented to them by the crowd, if the sentinels did not prevent them. Judging from what he had heard from Wojtek, Bartek had had a wholly different impression of the French, and this took his breath away. He looked to see if Wojtek were anywhere about, and found him standing close by.

'What did you say?' asked Bartek. 'By all the Saints! I shouldn't be more surprised if I had lost my head!'

'They must have been starved somehow,' answered Wojtek, equally disillusioned.

'What are they jabbering?'

'It's certainly not Polish.'

Reassured by this impression, Bartek walked on past the carriages. 'Miserable wretches!' he said, when he had finished his review of the Regulars.

But the last carriages contained Zouaves, and these gave Bartek food for further reflection. From the fact that they sat huddled together in the carriages, it was impossible to discover whether each man were equal to two or three ordinary men; but, through the window, he saw the long, martial beards, and grave faces of

veteran soldiers with dark complexions and alarmingly shining eyes. Again Bartek's heart leapt to his mouth.

'These are the worst of all,' he whispered low, as if afraid they might hear him.

'You have not yet seen those who have not let themselves be taken prisoner,' replied Wojtek.

'Heaven preserve us!'

'Now do you understand?'

Having finished looking at the Zouaves, they walked on. At the last carriage Bartek suddenly started back as if he had touched fire.

'Oh, Wojtek, Lord help us!'

There was the dark—nearly black—face of a Turco at the open window, rolling his eyes so that the whites showed. He must have been wounded, for his face was contorted with pain.

'But what's the matter?' asked Wojtek.

'That must be the Evil One, it's not a soldier. Lord have mercy on my sins!'

'Look at his teeth!'

'May he go to perdition! I shan't look at him any longer.'

Bartek was silent, then asked after a moment:

'Wojtek?'

'Yes?'

'Mightn't it be a good thing to cross oneself before anyone like that?'

'The heathen don't understand anything about the holy truth.'

The signal was given for taking their seats. In a few moments the train was moving. When it grew dusk Bartek continually saw before him the Turco's dark face with the terrible white of his eyes. From the feeling which at the moment animated this Pognębin soldier, it would not have been possible to foretell his future deeds.

CHAPTER IV

THE particular share he took at first in the pitched battle of Gravelotte, merely convinced Bartek of this fact,—that in war there is plenty to look at, but nothing to do. For at the commencement he and his regiment were told to order arms and wait at the bottom of a hill covered by a vineyard. The guns were booming in the distance, squadrons of cavalry charged past near at hand with a clatter which shook the earth; then the flags passed, then Cuirassiers with drawn swords. The shells on the hill flew hissing across the blue sky in the form of small white clouds, then smoke filled the air and hid the horizon. The battle seemed like a storm which passes through a district without lasting long anywhere.

After the first hours, unusual activity was displayed round Bartek's regiment. Other regiments began to be massed round his, and in the spaces between them, the guns, drawn by plunging horses, rushed along, and, hastily unlimbered, were pointed towards the hill. The whole valley

became full of troops. Commands were now thundered from all sides, the Aides-de-Camps rushed about wildly, and the private soldiers said to one another:

'Ah! it will be our turn now! It's coming!' or enquired uneasily of one another,

'Isn't it yet time to start?'

'Surely it must be!'

The question of life and death was now beginning to hang in the balance. Something in the smoke, which hid the horizon, burst close at hand with a terrible explosion. The deep roar of the cannon and the crack of the rifle firing was heard ever nearer; it was like an indistinct sound coming from a distance,—then the mitrailleuse became audible. Suddenly the guns, placed in position, boomed forth until the earth and air trembled together. The shells whistled frightfully through Bartek's company. Watching they saw something bright red, a little cloud, as it might be, and in that cloud something whistled, rushed, rattled, roared, and shrieked. The men shouted: 'A shell! A shell,' and at the same moment this vulture of war sped forward like a gale, came near, fell, and burst! A terrible roar met the ear, a crash as if the world had collapsed, followed by a rushing sound, as before a puff of wind! Confusion reigned in the lines standing in the neighbourhood of the guns, then came the cry and

command 'Stand ready!' Bartek stood in the front rank, his rifle at his shoulder, his head turned towards the hill, his mouth set,—so his teeth were not chattering. He was forbidden to tremble, he was forbidden to shoot. He had only to stand still and wait! But now another shell burst,—three, four, ten. The wind lifted the smoke from the hill: the French had already driven the Prussian battery from it, had placed theirs in position, and now opened fire on to the valley. Every moment from under cover of the vineyard they sent forth long white columns of smoke. Protected by the guns, the enemy's infantry continued to advance, in order to open fire. They were already half way down the hill and could now be seen plainly, for the wind was driving the smoke away. Would the vineyard prove an obstacle to them? No, the dark caps of the infantry were advancing. Suddenly they disappeared under the tall arches of the vines, and there was nothing to be seen but tricolour flags waving here and there. The rifle fire began fiercely but intermittently, continually starting in fresh and unexpected places. Shells burst above it, and crossed one another in the air. Now and then cries rang out from the hill, which were answered from below by a German 'Hurrah!' The guns from the valley sent forth an uninterrupted fire; the regiment stood unflinching.

The line of fire began to embrace it more closely, however. The bullets hummed in the distance like gnats and flies, or passed near with a terrible whizz. More and more of them came :— hundreds, thousands, whistling round their heads, their noses, their eyes, their shoulders; it was astonishing there should be a man left standing. Suddenly Bartek heard a groan close by : ' Jesu !' then ' Stand ready !' then again ' Jesu !' ' Stand ready !' Soon the groans went on without intermission, the words of command came faster and faster, the lines drew in closer, the whizzing grew more frequent, more uninterrupted, more terrible. The dead covered the ground. It was like the Judgment Day.

' Are you afraid?' Wojtek asked.

'Why shouldn't I be afraid?' our hero answered, his teeth chattering.

Nevertheless both Bartek and Wojtek still kept their feet, and it did not even enter their heads to run away. They had been commanded to stand still and receive the enemy's fire. Bartek had not spoken the truth; he was not as much afraid as thousands of others would have been in his place. Discipline held the mastery over his imagination, and his imagination had never painted such a horrible situation as this. Nevertheless Bartek felt that he would be killed, and he confided this thought to Wojtek.

'There won't be room in Heaven for the numbers they kill,' Wojtek answered in an excited voice.

These words comforted Bartek perceptibly. He began to hope that his place in Heaven had already been taken. Re-assured with regard to this, he stood more patiently, conscious only of the intense heat, and with the perspiration running down his face. Meantime the firing became so heavy that the ranks were thinning visibly. There was no one to carry away the killed and wounded; the death rattle of the dying mingled with the whizz of shells and the din of shooting. One could see by the movement of the tricolour flags that the infantry hidden by the vines was coming closer and closer. The volleys of mitrailleuse decimated the ranks; the men were beginning to grow desperate.

But underlying this despair were impatience and rage. Had they been commanded to go forward, they would have gone like a whirlwind. It was impossible to merely stand still in one spot. A soldier suddenly threw down his helmet with his whole force, and exclaimed:

'Curse it! One death is as good as another!'

Bartek again experienced such a feeling of relief from these words that he almost entirely ceased to be afraid. For if one death was as good as another, what did anything matter? This rustic

philosophy was calculated to arouse courage more rapidly than any other. Bartek knew that one death was as good as another, but it pleased him to hear it, especially as the battle was now turning into a defeat. For here was a regiment which had never fired a single shot, and was already half annihilated. Crowds of soldiers from other regiments which had been scattered, ran in amongst and round theirs in disorder; only these peasants from Pognębin, Great and Little Krzywda, and Mizerów still remained firm, upholding Prussian discipline. But even amongst them a certain degree of hesitation now began to be felt. Another moment and they would have burst the restraint of discipline. The ground under their feet was already soft and slippery with blood, the stench of which mingled with the smell of gunpowder. In several places the lines could not join up closely, because the dead bodies made gaps in them. At the feet of those men yet standing, the other half lay bleeding, groaning, struggling, dying, or in the silence of death. There was no air to breathe in. They began to grumble:

'They have brought us out to be slaughtered!'

'No one will come out of this!'

'Silence, Polish dogs!' sounded the officer's voice.

'I should just like you to be standing in my shoes!'

'Where is that fellow?'

Suddenly a voice began to repeat:

'Beneath Thy Shadow . . . . . .'

Bartek instantly took it up:

'We flee, O holy Son of God!'

And soon on that field of carnage a chorus of Polish voices was calling to the Defender of their nation:

'Of Thy favour regard our prayers.'

while from beneath their feet there came the accompaniment of groans: 'Mary! Mary!' She had evidently heard them, for at that moment the Aide-de-Camps came galloping up, and the command rang forth: 'Arms to the attack! Hurrah! Forward!' The crest of bayonets was suddenly lowered, the column stretched out into a long line and sprang towards the hill to seek with their bayonets the enemy they could not discover with their eyes. The men were, however, still two hundred yards from the foot of the hill, and they had to traverse that distance under a murderous fire. Would they not perish like the rest? Would they not be obliged to retreat? Perish they might, but retreat they could not, for the Prussian commander knows what tune will bring Polish soldiers to the attack. Amid the roar of cannon, amid the rifle fire and the smoke, the confusion and groaning, loudest of all sounded the drums and trumpets, playing the hymn at which every single drop

of blood leapt in their veins. 'Hurrah!' answered the Macki[1] 'as long as we live!' Frenzy seized them. The fire met them full in the face. They went like a whirlwind over the prostrate bodies of men and horses, over the wrecks of cannon. They fell, but they went with a shout and a song. They had already reached the vineyard and disappeared into its enclosure. Only the song was heard, and at times a bayonet glittered. On the hill the firing became increasingly fierce. In the valley the trumpets kept on sounding. The French volleys continued faster and faster,—still faster,—and suddenly—

Suddenly they were silent.

Down in the valley that old wardog, Steinmetz, lighted his clay pipe, and said in a tone of satisfaction:

'You have only to play to them! The daredevils will do it!'

And actually in a few moments one of the proudly waving tricolours was suddenly raised aloft, then drooped, and disappeared.

'They are not joking,' said Steinmetz.

Again the trumpets played the hymn, and a second Polish regiment went to the help of the first. In the enclosure a pitched battle with bayonets was taking place.

And now, oh Muse, sing of our hero, Bartek,

[1] 'Macki' = 'Tommies.'

that posterity may know of his deeds! The fear, impatience, and despair of his heart had mingled into the single feeling of rage, and when he heard that music each vein stood out in him like cast iron. His hair stood on end, his eyes shot fire. He forgot everything that had made up his world; he no longer cared whether one death was as good as another. Grasping his rifle firmly in his hands, he leapt forward with the others. Reaching the hill he fell down for the tenth time, struck his nose, and, bespattered with mud and the blood flowing from his nose, ran on madly and breathlessly, catching at the air with open mouth. He stared round, wishing to find some of the French in the enclosure as quickly as possible, and caught sight of three standing together near the flags. They were Turcos. Would Bartek retreat? No, indeed; he could have seized the horns of Lucifer himself now! He ran towards them at once, and they fell on him with a shout; two bayonets, like two deadly stings, had actually touched his chest already, but Bartek lowered his bayonet. A dreadful cry followed,—a groan, and two dark bodies lay writhing convulsively on the ground.

At that moment the third, who carried the flag, ran up to help his two comrades. Like a Fury, Bartek leapt on him with his whole strength. The firing flashed and roared in the distance, while Bartek's hoarse roar rang out through the smoke:

'Go to Hell!'

And again the rifle in his hand described a fearful semi-circle, again groans responded to his thrusts. The Turcos retreated in terror at the sight of this furious giant, but either Bartek misunderstood, or they shouted out something in Arabic, for it seemed to him that their thick lips distinctly uttered the cry: 'Magda! Magda!'

'Magda will give it you!' howled Bartek, and with one leap he was in the enemy's midst.

Happily at that moment some of his comrades ran up to his assistance. A hand to hand fight now took place in the enclosure of the vineyard. There was the crack of rifles at close quarters, and the hot breath of the combatants sounded through their nostrils. Bartek raged like a storm. Blinded by smoke, streaming with blood, more like a wild beast than a man, and regardless of everything, he mowed down men at each blow, broke rifles, cracked heads. His hands moved with the terrible swiftness of a machine sowing destruction. He attacked the Ensign, and seized him by the throat with an iron grip. The Ensign's eyes turned upwards, his face swelled, his throat rattled, and his hands let the pole fall.

'Hurrah!' cried Bartek, and, lifting the flag, he waved it in the air.

This was the flag raised aloft and drooping, which Steinmetz had seen from below.

But he could only see it for half a second, for in the next—Bartek had trampled it to shreds. Meanwhile his comrades were already rushing on ahead.

Bartek remained alone for a moment. He tore off the flag, hid it in his breast pocket, and, having seized the pole in both hands, rushed after his comrades.

A crowd of Turcos, shouting in a barbarous tongue, now fled towards the gun placed on the summit of the hill, the Macki after them, shouting, pursuing, striking with butt-end and bayonet.

The Zouaves, who were stationed by the guns, received the first men with rifle fire.

'Hurrah!' shouted Bartek.

The men ran up to the guns, and a fresh struggle took place round these. At that moment the second Polish regiment came to the aid of the first. The flag pole in Bartek's powerful hands was now changed into a kind of infernal flail. Each stroke dealt by it opened a free passage through the close lines of the French. The Zouaves and Turcos began to be seized with panic, and they fled from the place where Bartek was fighting. Within a few moments Bartek was sitting astride the gun, as he might his Pognębin mare.

But scarcely had the soldiers had time to see him on this, when he was already on the second, after killing another Ensign who was standing by it with the flag.

'Hurrah, Bartek!' repeatedly exclaimed the soldiers.

The victory was complete. All the ammunition was captured. The infantry fled, and after being surrounded by Prussian reinforcements on the other side of the hill, laid down their arms.

Bartek captured yet a third flag during the pursuit.

It was worth seeing him, when exhausted, covered with blood, and blowing like a blacksmith's bellows, he now descended the hill together with the rest, bearing the three flags on his shoulder. The French? Why, what had not he alone done to them! By his side went Wojtek, scratched and scarred, so he turned to him and said:

'What did you say? Why, they are miserable wretches; there isn't a scrap of strength in their bones! They have just scratched you and me like kittens, and that's all. But how I have bled them you can see by the ground!'

'Who would have known that you could be so brave!' replied Wojtek, who had watched Bartek's deeds, and began to look at him in quite a different light.

But who has not heard of these deeds? History, all the regiment and the greater number of the officers. Everybody now looked with astonishment at this country giant with the flaxen mous-

tache and goggle eyes. The Major himself said to him, 'Ah, you confounded Pole!' and pulled his ear, making Bartek grin to his back teeth with pleasure. When the regiment stood once more at the foot of the hill, the Major pointed him out to the Colonel, and the Colonel to Steinmetz himself.

The latter noticed the flags, and ordered that they should be taken charge of; then he began to look at Bartek. Our friend Bartek again stood as straight as a fiddle string, presenting arms, and the old General looked at him and shook his head with pleasure. Finally he began to say something to the Colonel; the words 'non-commissioned officer' were plainly audible.

'Too stupid, Your Excellency!' answered the Major.

'Let us try,' said His Excellency, and turning his horse, he approached Bartek.

Bartek himself scarcely knew what was happening to him: it was a thing unknown in the Prussian Army for the General to talk to a Private! His Excellency was the more easily able to do this, because he knew Polish. Moreover this Private had captured three flags and two guns.

'Where do you come from? enquired the General.

'From Pognębin,' answered Bartek.

'Good. Your name?'

'Bartek Słowik.'

'Mensch,' explained the Major.

'Mens!' Bartek tried to repeat.

'Do you know why you are fighting the French?'

'I know, Your Excellency.'

'Tell me.'

Bartek began to stammer, 'Because, because—' Then on a sudden Wojtek's words fortunately came into his mind, and he burst out with them quickly, so as not to get confused: 'Because they are Germans too, only worse villains!'

His Excellency's face began to twitch as if he felt inclined to burst out laughing. After a moment, however, His Excellency turned to the Major, and said:

'You are right, Sir.'

Our friend Bartek, satisfied with himself, remained standing as straight as a fiddle string.

'Who won the battle to-day?' the General asked again.

'I, Your Excellency,' Bartek answered without hesitation.

His Excellency's face again began to twitch.

'Right, very right, it was you! And here you have your reward.'

Here the old soldier unpinned the iron cross from his own breast, stooped and pinned it on

to Bartek. The General's good humour was reflected in a perfectly natural way on the faces of the Colonel, the Majors, the Captains, down to the non-commissioned officers. After the General's departure the Colonel for his own part presented Bartek with ten thalers, the Major with five, and so on. Everyone repeated to him smilingly that he had won the battle, with the result that Bartek was in the seventh heaven.

It was a strange thing: the only person who was not really satisfied with our hero was Wojtek.

In the evening, when they were both sitting round the fire, and when Bartek's distinguished face was bulging as much with pea sausage as the sausage itself, Wojtek ejaculated in a tone of resignation:

'Oh Bartek, what a blockhead you are, because—'

'But why?' said Bartek, between his bites of sausage.

'Why, man, didn't you tell the General that the French are Germans?'

'You said so yourself.'

'And what of that?—'

Wojtek began to stammer a little—'Well, though they may be Germans, you needn't have told him so, because it's always unpleasant—'

'But I said it about the French, not about them . . .'

'Ah, because when . . .'

Wojtek stopped short, though evidently wishing to say something further; he wished to explain to Bartek that it is not suitable when among Germans to speak evil of them, but somehow his tongue became entangled.

CHAPTER V

A little while later the Royal Prussian Mail brought the following letter to Pognębin:

May Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother be praised.

Dearest Magda! What news of you? It is all right for you to be able to rest quietly in bed at home, but I am fighting horribly hard here. We have been surrounding the great fort of Metz, and there was a battle, and I did for so many of the French that all the Infantry and Artillery were astonished. And the General himself was astonished, and said that I had won the battle, and gave me a cross. And the officers and non-commissioned officers respect me very much now, and rarely box my ears. Afterwards we marched on further, and there was a second battle, but I have forgotten what the town was called; there also I seized and carried off four flags, and knocked down one of the biggest Colonels in the Cuirassiers, and took him prisoner. And as our regiment is going to be sent home, the Sergeant has advised me to ask to be transferred and to stay on here, for in war it is only sleep you do not get, but you may eat as much as you can stand, and in this country there is wine everywhere, for they are a rich nation. We have also burnt a town and we did not spare even women or children, nor did I. The church was burnt on purpose, because they are Catholics, and very wicked people. We are now going on to the Emperor himself, and that will be the end of the war, but you take care of the cottage and Franek, for if you do not take care of it, then I will beat you till you have learnt what sort of a man I am. I commend you to God.

Bartłomiej Słowik.

Bartek was evidently developing a taste for war, and beginning to regard it as his proper trade. He felt greater confidence in himself, and now went into battle as he might have gone to his work at Pognębin. Medals and crosses covered his breast, and although he did not become a non-commissioned officer, he was universally regarded as the foremost Private in the regiment. He was always well disciplined, as before, and possessed the blind courage of the man who simply takes no account of danger. The courage actuating him was no longer of the same kind as that which had filled him in his first moments of fury, for it now sprang from military experience and faith in himself. Added to this his giant strength could endure all kinds of fatigue, marches, and overstrain. Men fell at his side, he alone went on unharmed, only working all the harder and developing more and more into the stern Prussian soldier. He now not only fought the French, but hated them. Some of his other ideas also changed. He became a soldier-patriot, blindly extolling his leaders. In another letter to Magda he wrote:

Wojtek is divided in his opinion, and so there is a quarrel between us, do you understand? He is a scoundrel, too, because he says that the French are Germans, but they are French, and we are Germans.

Magda, in her reply to both letters, set about

abusing him with the first words that came into her head.

Dearest Bartek (she wrote), married to me before the holy Altar! May God punish you! You yourself are a scoundrel, you heathen, going with those wretches to murder half a nation of Catholics. Do you not understand, then, that those wretches are Lutherans, and that you, a Catholic, are helping them? You like war, you ruffian, because you are able now to do nothing but fight, drink, and illtreat others, and to go without fasting; and you burn churches. But may you burn in Hell for that, because you are even proud of it, and have no thought for old people or children. Remember what has been written in golden letters in the Holy Scriptures about the Polish nation, from the beginning of the world to the Judgment Day,—when God most High will have no regard for sluggards,—and restrain yourself, you Turk, that I may not smash your head to pieces. I have sent you five thalers, although I have need of them here, for I do not know which way to turn, and the household savings are getting short. I embrace you, dearest Bartek.

MAGDA.

The moral contained in these lines made little impression on Bartek. 'The wife does not remember her vows,' he thought to himself, 'and is meddling.' And he continued to make war on the aged. He distinguished himself in every battle so greatly, that finally he again came under the honoured notice of Steinmetz. Ultimately when the shattered Polish regiment was sent back into the depths of Germany, he took the sergeant's advice of applying for leave to be transferred, and stayed behind. The result of this was that he found himself outside Paris.

His letters were now full of contempt for the French. 'They run away like hares in every battle,' he wrote to Magda, and he wrote the truth. But the siege did not prove to his taste. He had to dig or to lie in the trenches round Paris for whole days, listening to the roar of the guns, and often getting soaked through. Besides, he missed his old regiment. In the one to which he had been transferred as a volunteer, he was surrounded by Germans. He knew some German, having already learnt a little at the factory, but only about five in ten words; now he quickly began to grow familiar with it. The regiment nicknamed him 'the Polish dog,' however, and it was only his decorations and his terrifying fists which shielded him from disagreeable jokes. Nevertheless, he earned the respect of his new comrades, and began little by little to make friends with them. Since he covered the whole regiment with glory, they ultimately came to look upon him as one of themselves. Bartek would always have considered himself insulted if anyone called him German, but in thinking of himself in distinction to the French he called himself 'ein Deutscher.' To himself he appeared entirely distinct, but at the same time he did not wish to pass for worse than others. An incident occurred, nevertheless, which might have given him plenty to reflect upon, had reflection come more easily to this hero's mind.

Some Companies of his regiment had been sent out against some volunteer sharpshooters, and laid an ambush for them, into which they fell. But the detachment was composed of veteran soldiers, the remains of some of the foreign regiments, and this time Bartek did not see the dark caps running away after the first shots. They defended themselves stubbornly when surrounded, and rushed forward to force their way through the encircling Prussian soldiery. They fought so desperately that half of them cut their way through, and knowing the fate that awaited captured sharpshooters, few allowed themselves to be taken alive. The Company in which Bartek was serving therefore only took two prisoners. These were lodged overnight in a forester's house, and the next day they were to be shot. A small guard of soldiers stood outside the door, but Bartek was stationed in the room under the open window with the prisoners, who were bound.

One of the prisoners was a man no longer young, with a grey moustache, and a face expressing indifference to everything; the other appeared to be about twenty-two years of age. With his fair moustache yet scarcely showing, his face was more like a woman's that a soldier's.

'Well, this is the end of it,' the young man said after a while, 'a bullet through your head—and it's all over!'

Bartek shuddered until the rifle in his hand rattled; the youth talked Polish.

'It is all the same to me,' the second answered in a gruff voice, 'as I live, all the same! I have lived so long, I have had enough.'

Bartek's heart beat quicker and quicker under his uniform.

'Listen, then,' the older man continued, 'there is no help for it. If you are afraid, think about something else, or go to sleep. Enjoy what you can. As God loves me, I don't care!'

'My mother will grieve for me,' the youth replied low; and, evidently wishing to suppress his emotion, or else to deceive himself, he began to whistle. He suddenly interrupted this, and cried in a voice of deep despair, 'I did not even say good-bye!'

'Then did you run away from home?'

'Yes. I thought the Germans would be beaten, so there would be better things coming for Poland.'

'And I thought the same. But now—'

Waving his hand, the old man finished speaking in a low voice, and his last words were overpowered by the roar of the wind. The night was dark. Clouds of fine rain swept past from time to time; the wood close by was black as a pall. The gale whistled round the corners of the room, and howled in the chimney like a dog. The

lamp, placed high above the window to prevent the wind from extinguishing it, threw a flood of bright light into the room. But Bartek, who was standing close to it under the window, was plunged in darkness.

And it was perhaps better the prisoners should not see his face, for strange things were taking place in this peasant's mind. At first he had been filled with astonishment, and had stared hard at the prisoners, trying to understand what they were saying. So these men had set out to beat the Germans to benefit Poland, and he had beaten the French, in order that Poland might benefit! And to-morrow these two men would be shot! How was that? What was a poor fellow to think about it? But if only he could hint it to them, if only he could tell them that he was their man, that he pitied them! He felt a sudden catch in his throat. What could he do for them? Could he rescue them? Then *he* would be shot! Good God! what was happening to him? He was so overcome by pity that he could not remain in the room.

A strange intense longing suddenly came upon him till he seemed somewhere far off at Pognębin. Pity, hitherto an unknown guest in his soldier's heart, cried to him from the depth of his soul: 'Bartek, save them, they are your brothers!' and his heart, torn as never before, cried out for home,

for Magda, for Pognębin. He had had enough of the French, enough of this war, and of battles! The voice sounded clearer and clearer: 'Bartek, save them!' Confound this war! The woods showed dark through the open window, moaning like the Pognębin pines, and even in that moan something called out, 'Bartek, save them!'

What could he do? Should he escape to the wood with them, or what? All his Prussian discipline recoiled in aversion at the thought. In the Name of the Father and the Son! He need but cross himself at it! He,—a soldier, and desert? Never!

All the while the wood was moaning more loudly, the wind whistling more mournfully.

The elder prisoner suddenly whispered, 'That wind—like the Spring at home.'

'Leave me in peace!' the young man said in a Pognębin voice.

After a moment, however, he repeated several times:

'At home, at home, at home! God! God!'

Deep sighs mingled with the listening wind, and the prisoners lay silent once more.

Bartek began to tremble feverishly. There is nothing so bad for a man as to be unable to tell what is amiss with him. It seemed to Bartek as if he had stolen something, and were afraid of being taken in charge. He had a clear conscience,

nothing threatened him, but he was certainly terribly afraid of something. Indeed, his legs were trembling, his rifle had grown dreadfully heavy, and something—like bitter sobs—was choking him. Were these for Magda, or for Pognębin? For both, but also for that younger prisoner whom it was impossible to help.

At times Bartek fancied he must be asleep. All the while the storm raged more fiercely round the house, and the cries and voices multiplied strangely in the whistling of the wind.

Suddenly every hair of Bartek's head stood on end under his helmet. For it seemed as if somewhere from out of the dark, rain-clad depths of the forest somebody were groaning, and repeating: 'At home, at home, at home!'

Bartek started back, and struck the floor with the butt end of his rifle to wake himself. He regained consciousness somehow and looked up. The prisoners lay in the corner, the lamp was burning brightly, the wind was howling,—all was in order.

The light fell full on to the face of the younger prisoner—a child's or girl's face. As he lay there with closed eyes, and straw under his head, he looked as if he were already dead.

Never in his life had Bartek been so wrung with pity! Something distinctly gripped his throat, and an audible cry was wrung from his breast.

At that moment the elder prisoner turned wearily on to his side, and said, 'Good-night, Władek.' Silence followed. An hour passed.

The wind played like the Pognębin organ. The prisoners lay silent. Suddenly the younger prisoner, raising himself a little by an effort, called, 'Karol?'

'What?'

'Are you asleep?'

'No.'

'Listen! I am afraid. Say what you like, but I shall pray.'

'Pray, then.'

'Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come.'

Sobs suddenly interrupted the young prisoner's words, yet the broken voice was still heard: 'Thy—will—be—done!'

'Oh Jesu!' something cried in Bartek, 'Oh Jesu!'

Impossible! He could stand it no longer.—Another moment, and exclaiming 'Lord, I am only a man!' he had leapt through the window into the wood. Let come what may! Suddenly measured steps were heard echoing from the direction of the hall: it was the patrol, the Sergeant with it. They were changing the guard!

Next day Bartek was drunk all day from early morning. The following day likewise . . . . . .

But fresh advances, fighting, and marches took place during the days following, and I am glad to say that our hero regained his equilibrium. A certain fondness for the bottle, in which it is always possible to find pleasure and at times forgetfulness, remained with him after that night, however. For the rest, in battle he was more terrible than ever; victory followed in his wake.

CHAPTER VI

SOME months had passd, and the Spring was now well advanced. The cherry trees at Pognębin were in blossom and the young corn was sprouting abundantly in the fields. One day Magda, seated in front of the cottage, was peeling some rotten potatoes for dinner, fitter for cattle than for human beings. But it was Spring-time, and poverty had visited Pognębin. That could be seen too by the saddened and worried look on Magda's face. Possibly in order to distract herself, the woman, closing her eyes, sang in a thin, strained voice :

> Alas, my Jasieńko has gone to the war ! he writes me letters ;
> Alas, and I his wife write to him,—for I cannot see him.

The sparrows twittered in the cherry trees as if they were trying to emulate her. She stopped her song and gazed absently at the dog sleeping in the sun, at the road passing the cottage, and the path leading from the road through the garden and field. Perhaps Magda glanced at the path because it led across to the station and, as God

willed, she did not look in vain that day. A figure appeared in the distance, and the woman shaded her eyes with her hand, but she could not see clearly, being blinded by the glare. Łysek woke up, however, raised his head, and giving a short bark, began to grow excited, pricking up his ears and turning his head from side to side. At the same moment the words of a song reached Magda indistinctly. Łysek sprang up suddenly and ran at full speed towards the newcomer. Then Magda turned a little pale.

'Is it Bartek,—or not?'

She jumped up so quickly that the bowl of potatoes rolled on to the ground: there was no longer any doubt; Łysek was bounding up to his shoulder. The woman rushed forward, shouting in the full strength of her joy: 'Bartek! Bartek!'

'Magda, here I am!' Bartek cried, throwing her a kiss, and hurrying towards her. He opened the gate, stumbled over the step so that he all but fell, recovered himself,—and they were clasped in one anothers' arms.

The woman began to speak quickly:

'And I had thought that you would not come back. I thought "they will kill him!"—How are you?—Let me see. How good to look at you! You are terribly thin! Oh Jesu! Poor fellow!—Oh, my dearest! . . . He has come back, come back!'

For one moment she tore herself from his neck and looked at him, then threw herself on to it again.

'Come back! The Lord be praised! Bartek, my darling! How are you? Go indoors! Franek is at school being teased by that horrid German! The boy is well. He's as dull in the upper storey as you are. Oh, but it was time for you to come back! I didn't know any more which way to turn. I was miserable, I tell you, miserable! This whole poor house is going into ruins. The roof is off the barn. How are you? Oh, Bartek! Bartek! That I should actually see you, after all! What trouble I have had with the hay!—The neighbours helped me, but they did it to help themselves! How are you?—Well? Oh, but I am glad to have you,—glad! The Lord watched over you. Go indoors. By God, it's like Bartek, and not like Bartek! What's the matter with you? Oh dear! Oh dear!'

At that instant Magda had become aware of a long scar running along Bartek's face across his left temple and cheek and down to his beard.

'It's nothing.—A Cuirassier did it for me, but I did the same for him. I have been in hospital.'

'Oh Jesu!'

'Why, it's a mere flea-bite.'

'But you are starved to death.'

'Ruhig!' answered Bartek.

He was in truth emaciated, begrimed and in rags :—a true conqueror ! He swayed too as he stood.

'What's wrong with you? Are you drunk?'

'I—am still weak.'

That he was weak, was certain, but he was tipsy also. For one glass of vodka would have been sufficient in his state of exhaustion, and Bartek had drunk something like four at the station. The result was that he had the bearing of the true conqueror. He had not been like this formerly.

'Ruhig !' he repeated. 'We have finished the Krieg. I am a gentleman now, do you understand? Look here ! ' he pointed to his crosses and medals. 'Do you know who I am? Eh? Links ! Rechts ! Heu ! Stroh ! Halt !'

At the word, 'halt,' he gave such a shrill shout that the woman recoiled several steps.

'Are you mad?'

'How are you, Magda? When I say to you "how are you" then how are you? Do you know French, stupid? "Musiu, Musiu !" What is "Musiu?" I am a "Musiu," do you understand?'

'Man, what's up with you?'

'What's that to you ! Was? "Doné diner," do you understand?'

A storm began to gather on Magda's brow.

'What rubbish are you jabbering? What's

this,—you don't know Polish? That's all through those wretches. I said how it would be! What have they done to you?

'Give me something to eat!'

'Be quick indoors.'

Every command made an irresistible impression on Bartek; hearing this 'Be quick' he drew himself up, held his hand stiffly to his side, and, having made a half-turn, marched in the direction indicated. He stood still at the threshold, however, and began to look wonderingly at Magda.

'Well, what do you want, Magda? What do . . .?'

'Quick! March!'

He entered the cottage, but fell over the threshold. The vodka was now beginning to go to his head. He started singing, and looked round the cottage for Franek, even saying 'Morgen, Kerl,' although Franek was not there. After that he laughed loudly, staggered, shouted 'Hurrah!' and fell full length on the bed. In the evening he awoke sober and rested, and welcomed Franek, then, having got some pence out of Magda, he took his triumphant way to the inn. The glory of his deeds had already preceded him to Pognębin, since more than one of the soldiers from other divisions of the same regiment, having returned earlier, had related how he had distinguished himself at Gravelotte and Sedan. So

now when the rumour spread that the conqueror was at the inn, all his old comrades hastened there to welcome him.

No one would have recognized our friend Bartek, as he now sat at the table. He, formerly so meek, was to be seen striking his fist on the table, puffing himself out and gobbling like a turkey-cock.

'Do you remember, you fellows, that time I did for the French, what Steinmetz said?'

'How could we forget?'

'People used to talk about the French, and be frightened of them, but they are a poor lot—*was?* They run like hares into the lettuce, and run away like hares too. They don't drink beer either, nothing but strong wine.'

'That's it!'

'When we burnt a town they would wring their hands immediately and cry "Pitié, pitié,"[1] as if they meant they would give us a drink if we would only leave them alone. But we paid no attention to them.'

'Then can one understand their gibberish?' enquired a young farmer's lad.

'You wouldn't understand, because you are stupid, but I understand. "Doné di pę!"[2] Do you understand?'

[1] Polish 'picie' = a drink. [2] Polish ę = French *in*.

'But what did you do?'

'Do you know about Paris? We had one battle after another there, but we won them all. They have no good commanders. People say so too. "The ground enclosed by the hedge is good," they say, "but it has been badly managed." Their officers are bad managers, and their generals are bad managers, but on our side they are good.'

Maciej Kierz, the wise old innkeeper of Pognębin, began to shake his head.

'Well, the Germans have been victorious in a terrible war; they have been victorious—but I always thought they would be. But the Lord alone knows what will come out of it for us.'

Bartek stared at him.

'What do you say?'

'The Germans have never cared to consider us much, anyhow, but, now they will be as stuck up as if there were no God above them. And they will illtreat us still more than they do already.'

'But that's not true!' Bartek said.

Old Kierz was a person of such authority in Pognębin that all the village always thought as he did, and it was sheer audacity to contradict him. But Bartek was a conqueror now, and an authority himself. All the same they gazed at him in astonishment, and even in some indignation.

'Who are you, to quarrel with Maciej? Who are you—?'

'What's Maciej to me? It isn't to such as he that I have talked, you see! Why, you fellows, I talked, didn't I, to Steinmetz—*was*? But let Maciej fancy what he likes. We shall be better off now.'

Maciej looked at the conqueror for a moment.

'You Blockhead!' he said.

Bartek struck his fist on the table, making all the glasses and pint-pots start up.

'Still, der Kerl da! Heu! Stroh!'

'Silence, no row! Ask the Priest or the Count, Blockhead.'

'Was the Priest in the war? Or was the Count there? But I was there. It's not true, boys. They'll know now how to respect us. Who won the battle? We won it, I won it. Now they'll give us anything we ask for. If I had wanted to become a land-owner in France, I should have stayed there. The Government knows very well who gave the French the best beating. And our regiment was the best. They said so in the military despatches. So now the Poles will get the upper hand;—do you see?'

Kierz waved his hand, stood up, and went out. Bartek had carried off the victory in the field of politics also. The young men remaining with him, regarded him as a perfect marvel. He continued:

'As if they wouldn't give me anything I want!

If I don't get it, I should like to know who would! Old Kierz is a scoundrel, do you see? The Government commands you to fight, so you must fight. Who will illtreat me? The Germans? Is it likely?'

Here he again displayed his crosses and medals.

'And for whom did I beat the French? Not for the Germans, surely? I am a better man now than a German, for there's not one German as strong. Bring us some beer! I have talked to Steinmetz, and I have talked to Podbielski. Bring us some beer!'

They slowly prepared for their carouse.

Bartek began to sing:

Drink, drink, drink,
As long as in my pocket
Still the pennies chink!

Suddenly he took a handful of pence from his pocket.

'Beer! I am a gentleman now.—Won't you? I tell you in France we were not so flush of money;—there was little we didn't burn, and few people we didn't put a shot into!—God doesn't know which—of the French—.'

A tippler's moods are subject to rapid changes. Bartek unexpectedly raked together the money from the table, and began to exclaim sadly:

'Lord, have mercy on the sins of my soul!'

Then, propping both elbows on the table, and hiding his head in his hands, he was silent.

'What's the matter?' inquired one of the drinkers.

'Why was I to blame for them?' Bartek murmured sadly. 'It was their own look-out. I was sorry for them, for they were both in my hands. Lord! have mercy! One was as the ruddy dawn! next day he was as white as cheese. And even after that I still—Vodka!'

A moment of gloomy silence followed. The men looked at one another in astonishment.

'What is he saying?' one asked.

'He is settling something with his conscience.'

'A man must drink in spite of that war.'

He filled up his glass of vodka once or twice, then he spat, and his good humour unexpectedly returned.

'Have you ever stood talking to Steinmetz? But I have! Hurrah!—Drink! Who pays? I do!'

'You may pay, you drunkard,' sounded Magda's voice, 'but I will repay you! Never fear!'

Bartek looked at his wife with glassy eyes.

'Have you talked to Steinmetz? Who are you?'

Instead of replying to him, Magda turned to the interested listeners, and began to exclaim:

'Oh, you men, you wretched men, do you see the disgrace and misery I am in? He came back, and I was glad to welcome him as a good man, but he came back drunk. He has forgotten God,

and he has forgotten Polish. He went to sleep, he woke up sober, and now he's drinking again, and paying for it with my money, which I had earned by my own work. And where have you taken that money from? Isn't it what I have earned by all my trouble and slavery? I tell you men, he's no longer a Catholic, he's not a man any more, he's bewitched by the Germans, he jabbers German, and is just waiting to do harm to people. He's possessed . . .'

Here the woman burst into tears; then, raising her voice an octave higher:—'He was stupid, but he was good. But now, what have they done to him? I looked out for him in the evening, I looked out for him in the morning, and I have lived to see him. There is no peace and no mercy anywhere. Great God! Merciful God!—If you had only left it alone,—if you had only remained German altogether!'

Her last words ended in such a wail, it was almost like a cadence. But Bartek merely said:

'Be quiet, or I shall do for you!'

'Strike me, hit my head, hit me now, kill me, murder me!' the woman screamed, and stretching her neck forward, she turned to the man.

'And you fellows, watch!—'

But the men were beginning to disperse. The inn was soon deserted, and only Bartek and his wife, with her neck stretched forward, remained.

'Why do you stretch out your neck like a goose?' murmured Bartek. 'Go home.'

'Hit me!' repeated Magda.

'Well, I shan't hit,' replied Bartek, putting his hands into his pockets. Here the innkeeper, wishing to put an end to the quarrel, turned out one of the lights. The room became dark and silent. After a while Magda's shrill voice sounded through the darkness:

'Hit me!'

'I shan't hit,' replied Bartek's triumphant voice.

Two figures were to be seen going by moonlight from the inn to the cottage. One of them, walking in front, was sobbing loudly; that was Magda; after her, hanging his head and following humbly enough, went the victor of Gravelotte and Sedan.

CHAPTER VII

BARTEK went home so tipsy that for some days he was unfit for work. This was most unfortunate for all his household affairs, which were in need of a strong man to look after them. Magda did her best. She worked from morning till night, and the neighbours helped her as well as they could, but even so she could not make both ends meet, and the household was being ruined little by little. Then there were a few small debts to the German Colonist, Just, who, having at a favourable moment bought some thirteen acres of waste land at Pognębin, now had the best property in the whole village. He had ready money besides, which he lent out at sufficiently high interest. He lent it chiefly to the owner of the property, Count Jarzyński, who bore the nickname of the 'Golden Prince,' but who was obliged to keep up his house in a style of befitting splendour for that very reason. Just, however, also lent to peasants. For six months Magda had owed him some twenty thalers, part of which she had bor-

rowed for her housekeeping, and part to send to Bartek during the war. Yet that need not have mattered. God had granted a good harvest, and it would have been possible to repay the debt out of the incoming crop, provided that the hands and the labour were forthcoming. Unluckily Bartek could not work. Magda did not quite believe this, and went to the priest for help, thinking he might rouse her husband; but this was really impossible. When at all tired, Bartek grew short of breath and his wounds pained him. So he sat in front of the cottage all day long, smoking his clay pipe with the figure of Bismarck in white uniform and a Cuirassier's helmet, and gazed at the world with the drowsy eyes of a man still feeling the effects of bodily fatigue. He pondered a little on the war, a little on his victories, on Magda,—a little on everything, a little on nothing.

One day, as he sat thus, he heard Franek crying in the distance on his way home from school. He was howling till the echoes rang.

Bartek pulled his pipe out of his mouth.

'Why, Franek, what's the matter with you?'

'What's the matter?' repeated Franek, sobbing.

'Why are you crying?'

'Why shouldn't I cry, when I have had my ears boxed?'

'Who boxed your ears?'

'Who? Why, Herr Boege!'

Herr Boege filled the post of schoolmaster at Pognębin.

'And has he a right to box your ears?'

'I suppose so, as he did it.'

Magda, who had been hoeing in the garden, came through the hedge, and, with the hoe in her hand, went up to the child.

'What are you saying?' she asked.

'What am I saying—? If that Boege didn't call me a Polish pig, and give me a box on the ears, and say that just as they have beaten the French now, so they will trample us underfoot, for they are the strongest. And I had done nothing to him, but he had asked me who is the greatest person in the world, and I had said it was the Holy Father, but he boxed my ears, and I began to cry, and he called me a Polish pig, and said that just as they have beaten the French . . .'

Franek was beginning it all over again,—'and he said, and I said,'—but Magda covered his mouth with her hand, and she herself, turning to Bartek, exclaimed:—

'Do you hear? Do you hear? Go to the French war, then let a German beat your child like a dog!—Curse him! Go to the war, and let this Swabian kill your child!—You have your reward! . . . May . . .'

Here Magda, moved by her own eloquence, also began to cry to Franek's accompaniment. Bartek stared open-mouthed with astonishment, and could not bring out a single word, or comprehend in the least what had happened. How was this? And what of his victories?—He sat on in silence for some moments, then suddenly something leaped into his eyes, and the blood rushed to his face. With ignorant people astonishment, like terror, often turns to rage. Bartek sprang up suddenly, and jerked out through his clenched teeth :—

'I will talk to him!'

And he went out. It was not far to go; the school lay close to the church. Herr Boege was just standing in front of the verandah, surrounded by a herd of young pigs, to which he was throwing pieces of bread.

He was a tall man, about fifty years of age, still as vigorous as an oak. He was not particularly stout, but his face was very fat, and he had a pair of very protruding eyes which expressed courage and energy.

Bartek went up to him very quickly.

'German, why have you been beating my child? *Was?*' he asked.

Herr Boege took a few steps backwards, measured him with a glance without a shade of fear, and said phlegmatically :—

'Begone, Polish prize-fighter!'

'Why have you been beating my child?' repeated Bartek.

'I will beat you too, you low Polish scoundrel! I will show you who is master here. Go to the devil, go to the law,—begone!'

Bartek, having seized the schoolmaster by the shoulder, began to shake him roughly, crying in a hoarse voice:—

'Do you know who I am? Do you know who did for the French? Do you know who talked to Steinmetz? Why do you beat my child, you cursed Swabian dog?'

Herr Boege's protruding eyes glared no less than Bartek's, but Boege was a strong man, and he resolved to free himself from his assailant by a single blow. This blow descended with a loud smack on the face of the victor of Gravelotte and Sedan.

At that the man forgot everything. Boege's head was shaken from side to side with a swift motion recalling a pendulum, but with this difference that the shaking was alarmingly rapid. The formidable vanquisher of Turcos and Zouaves awoke in Bartek once more. Boege's twelve year old son, Oscar, a lad as strong as his father, ran in vain to his assistance. A short, but terrible struggle took place, in which the son fell to the ground, and the father felt himself lifted up into the air. Bartek, raising his hand, held him there,

he himself scarcely knew how. Unluckily the tub of dishwater, which Herr Boege had been assiduously mixing for the pigs, stood near. Into this tub Herr Boege now capsized, and a moment later his feet were to be seen projecting from it, and kicking violently. His wife darted out of the house :—

' Help, to the rescue !'

The German colonists rushed from the houses near to their neighbour's assistance. Some of them fell on Bartek and began to belabour him with sticks and stones. In the general confusion which followed it was difficult to distinguish Bartek from his adversaries : some thirteen bodies were to be seen rolling round in a single mass, and struggling convulsively.

Suddenly, however, from out of this fighting mass Bartek burst forth like fury, making towards the hedge with all his might.

The Germans ran after him, but an alarming crack was heard in the hedge at the same moment, and Bartek's iron hands brandished a stout stick.

He returned raging and furious, holding the stick in the air : they all fled.

Bartek went after them, but luckily did not overtake anyone. Thus his rage cooled, and he began to retreat homewards. Ah ! if only it had been the French he had been facing ! His retreat would then have made immortal history.

As it was, he was being attacked by about a dozen people who, when they had reassembled, set on him afresh. Bartek retired slowly, like a wild boar pursued by dogs. He turned round now and then and stood still: then his pursuers stood still too. The stick had earned their complete respect.

They threw stones at him, nevertheless, one of which wounded Bartek in the forehead. The blood poured into his eyes, and he felt himself growing faint. He swayed once or twice, let go the stick, and fell down.

'Hurrah!' cried the Germans.

But by the time they reached him, Bartek had got up again: then they held back. This wounded wolf was still dangerous. Besides, he was now not far from the first cottage, and some labourers could be seen in the distance hurrying to the battlefield at full speed. The Germans retired to their houses.

'What has happened?' enquired the newcomers.

'I have been trying my hand a bit on the Germans,' Bartek answered. And he fainted.

CHAPTER VIII

IT proved a serious affair. The German newspapers published flaming articles on the persecutions to which the peaceful German population was subjected at the hands of the barbarian and ignorant masses, who were roused by socialist agitation and religious fanaticism. Boege became a hero. He, the quiet, gentle schoolmaster, spreading the light of learning on the far borders of the Empire; he, the true missionary of culture amid barbarians, had fallen a first victim to the riot. It was fortunate that there were a hundred million Germans to stand up for him, who would never allow . . . And so on.

Bartek did not know what a storm was brewing over his head. On the contrary, he was in good spirits; he was certain that he would win at the trial. For Boege had beaten his child, and had dealt him the first blow, and it had afterwards been he who had been attacked from behind! Surely he had a right to defend himself. They had also thrown a stone at his head,—actually thrown it at him, who had been mentioned in the daily despatches, who had won the battle of Grave-

lotte, had talked to Steinmetz himself, and received so many medals. It is true it never entered his head that the Germans did not know all this when they wronged him so greatly, any more than it occurred to him that Boege could substantiate his threat to Pognębin that the Germans would now trample it underfoot in the same way in which they, the Pognębinites, had so thoroughly beaten the French whenever they had had an opportunity. But as for himself, he was certain that public opinion and the Government would be in his favour. They would certainly know who he was, and what he had done during the war. If he was not a different man to what he thought him, Steinmetz would espouse his cause. Since Bartek was the poorer through the war, and his house in debt, they were, anyhow, not doing him justice.

All the same, the police from Pognębin rode up to Bartek's house. They had expected serious resistance, for as many as five appeared with loaded revolvers. They were mistaken; Bartek had not thought of offering any resistance. They told him to get into the carriage,—and he got in. Magda alone was desperate, persistently repeating:—

'Oh dear, what did you fight those French for? You will catch it now, poor fellow, that you will!'

'Be quiet, stupid!' Bartek answered, and

smiled quite cheerfully to the passers-by as he drove along.

'I'll show them who it is they have offended!' he cried from the carriage.

And, covered with his medals, he drove along to the trial like a conqueror.

As a matter of fact, the trial went in his favour. The judge decided to be lenient under the circumstances: Bartek was only condemned to three months' imprisonment.

In addition to this he had to pay a fine of 150 marks to the Boege family and 'other injured colonists.'

'Nevertheless the prisoner,' wrote the *Posener Zeitung* in the Criminal Report, 'showed not the slightest sign of contrition when the sentence was passed on him, but poured forth such a stream of invective, and began to enumerate his so-called services to the State in such an impudent manner, that it is surprising these insults to the Court and the German nation,' etc., etc.

Meanwhile Bartek in prison quietly recalled his deeds at Gravelotte, Sedan, and Paris.

We should, however, be doing an injustice in asserting that Herr Boege's action called forth no public censure. Very much the reverse. On a certain rainy morning a Polish Member of Parliament pointed out with great eloquence that the attitude of the Government towards the Poles had

altered in Posen; that, considering the courage and sacrifice displayed by the Polish regiments during the war, it would be fitting to have more regard for justice in the Polish provinces; finally, that Herr Boege at Pognębin had abused his position as schoolmaster by beating a Polish child, calling it a Polish pig, and holding out hopes that after this war the inhabitants would trample the native population under foot. The rain fell as the Member was speaking, and as such weather makes people sleepy, the Conservatives yawned, the National-Liberals yawned, the Centre yawned,—for they were still being faced by the 'Kultur-Kampf.'

Following immediately on this 'Polish question' the Chamber proceeded to the order of the day.

Meanwhile Bartek sat in prison, or rather, he lay in the prison infirmary, for the blow from the stone had re-opened the wound which he had received in the war.

When not feverish, he thought and thought, like the turkeycock that died of thinking. But Bartek did not die, he merely did not arrive at any conclusion.

Now and then, however, during moments, which Science names 'lucida intervalla,' it occurred to him that he had perhaps exerted himself unnecessarily in 'doing for' the French.

Difficult times followed for Magda. The fine

had to be paid, and there was nothing with which to pay it. The priest at Pognębin offered to help, but it turned out that there were not quite forty marks in his money box. The parish of Pognębin was poor; besides, the good old man never knew how his money went. Count Jarzyński was not at home. It was said that he had gone love-making to some rich lady in Prussia.

Magda did not know where to turn.

An extension of the loan was not to be thought of. What else, then? Should she sell the horse or the cows? Meanwhile Winter passed into Spring, the hardest time of all. It would soon be harvest, when she would need money for extra labour, and even now it was all exhausted. The woman wrung her hands in despair. She sent a petition to the Magistrate, recalling Bartek's services; she never even received an answer. The time for repayment of the loan was drawing near, and the sequestration with it.

She prayed and prayed, remembering bitterly the time when they were well off, and when Bartek used to earn money at the factory in winter. She tried to borrow money from her neighbours; they had none. The war had made itself felt all round. She did not dare to go to Just, because she was in his debt already, and had not even paid the interest. However, Just unexpectedly came to see her himself.

One afternoon she was sitting in the cottage doorway doing nothing, for despair had drained her strength. She was gazing before her at two golden butterflies chasing one another in the air, and thinking 'how happy those creatures are, they live for themselves and needn't pay'—and so on. After a while she sighed heavily, and a low cry broke from her pale lips: 'Oh God! God!' Suddenly at the gate appeared Just's long nose, and his long pipe beneath it. The woman turned pale. Just addressed her:—

'Morgen!'

'How are you, Herr Just?'

'What about my money?'

'Oh, my dear Herr Just, have pity! I am very poor, and what am I to do? They have taken my man away,—I have to pay the fine for him,—and I don't know where to turn. It would be better to die than to be worried like this from day to day. Do wait a while longer, dear Herr Just!'

She burst out crying, and seizing Herr Just's fat, red hand, she kissed it humbly. 'The Count will be back soon, then I will borrow from him, and give it back to you.'

'Well, and how will you repay the fine?'

'How can I tell?—I might sell the cow.'

'Then I will lend you some more.'

'May God Almighty repay you, my dear Sir! Although you are a Lutheran, you are a good

man. I speak the truth! If only other Germans were like you, Sir, one might bless them.'

'But I don't lend money without interest.'

'I know, I know.'

'Then write me one receipt for it all.'

'You are a kind gentleman, may God repay you too in the same way.'

'We will draw up the bill when I go into the town.'

He went into the town and drew up the bill, but Magda had gone to the priest for advice beforehand. Yet what could he advise? The priest said he was very sorry for her; the time given for repayment was short, the interest was high, Count Jarzyński was not at home; had he been, he might have helped. Magda, however, could not wait until the team was sold, and she was obliged to accept Just's terms. She contracted a debt of three hundred marks, that is, twice the amount of the fine, for it was certainly necessary to have a few pence in the house to carry on the housekeeping. On account of the importance of the document, Bartek was obliged to sign it, and for this reason Magda went to see him in prison. The conqueror was very depressed, dejected, and ill. He had wished to forward a petition, setting forth his grievances, but petitions were not accepted;—opinion in Administrative circles had turned against him since the Articles in the *Pose-*

ner Zcitung. For were not these very Authorities bound to afford protection to the peaceful German population, who, during the recent war, had given so many proofs of devotion and sacrifice to the Fatherland? They were therefore obliged in fairness to reject Bartek's petition. But it is not surprising that this should have depressed him at last.

'We are done for all round,' he said to his wife.

'All round,' she repeated.

Bartek began to ruminate deeply on the circumstances.

'It's a cruel injustice to me,' he said.

'That man Boege persecutes one,' Magda replied. 'I went to implore him, and he called me names too. Ah! the Germans have the upper hand now at Pognębin. They aren't afraid of anyone.'

'Of couse, for they are the strongest,' Bartek said sadly.

'As I am a plain woman, I tell you God is the strongest.'

'In Him is our refuge,' added Bartek.

They were both silent a moment, then he asked again:—

'Well, and what of Just?'

'If the Lord Almighty gives us a crop, then perhaps we shall be able to repay him. Possibly too the Count will help us, although he himself

has debts with the German. They said even before the war that he would have to sell Pognębin. Let us hope that he will bring home a rich wife.

'But will he be back soon?'

'Who knows? They say at the house that he will soon be coming with his wife. And directly he is back the Germans will be upon him. It's always those Germans! They are as plentiful as worms! Wherever one looks, whichever way one turns, whether in the village or the town—Germans for our sins! But where are we to get help from?'

'Perhaps you can decide on something, for you are a clever woman.'

'What can I advise? Should I have borrowed money from Just if I could have helped it? I did it for a good reason, but now the cottage in which we are settled, and the land also are already his. Just is better than other Germans, but he too has an eye to his own profit, not other people's. He won't be lenient to us any more than he has been lenient to others. I am not so stupid as not to know why he sticks his money in here! But what is one to do, what is one to do?' she cried, wringing her hands. 'Give some advice yourself, if you are clever. You can beat the French, but what will you do without a roof over your head, or a crust to eat?'

The victor of Gravelotte bent his head. 'Oh Jesu! Jesu!'

Magda had a kind heart; Bartek's grief touched her, so she said quickly:—

'Never mind, dear boy, never mind. Don't worry as long as you are not yet well. The rye is so fine, it's bending to the ground; the wheat the same. The ground doesn't belong to the Germans; it's as good as ever it was. The fields were in a bad state before your quarrel, but now they are growing so well, you'll see!'

Magda began to smile through her tears.

'The ground doesn't belong to the Germans,' she repeated once more.

'Magda!' Bartek said, looking at her with wide-open eyes, 'Magda!'

'What?'

'But,—because you are . . . if . . .'

Bartek felt deep gratitude towards her, but he could not express it.

CHAPTER IX

IN truth Magda was worth more than ten other women put together. Her manner towards Bartek was rather curt, but she was really attached to him. In moments of excitement, as, for example, in the prison, she told him to his face that he was stupid; nevertheless, before other people she would generally exclaim :—'My Bartek pretends to be stupid, but that's his slyness.' She used frequently to say this. As a matter of fact, Bartek was about as cunning as his horse, and without Magda he would have been unable to manage either his holding or anything else. Now, when everything rested on her honest shoulders, she left no stone unturned, running hither and thither to beg for help. A week after her last visit to the prison infirmary she ran in again to see Bartek, breathless, beaming, and happy.

'My word, Bartek, how are you?' she exclaimed gleefully. 'Do you know the Count has arrived! He was married in Prussia; the young

lady is a beauty! But he has done well for himself all round in getting her; fancy,—just fancy!'

The owner of Pognębin had really been married and come home with his wife, and had actually done very well by himself all round in finding her.

'Well, and what of that?' enquired Bartek.

'Be quiet, Blockhead,' Magda replied. 'Oh! how out of breath I am! Oh Jesu! I went to pay my respects to the lady. I looked at her: she came out to meet me like a queen, as young and charming as a flower, and as beautiful as the dawn!'—Oh dear, how out of breath I am!—'

Magda took her handkerchief, and began to wipe the perspiration from her face. The next instant she started talking again in a gasping voice: —

'She had a blue dress like that blue-bottle. I fell at her feet, and she gave me her hand;—I kissed it,—and her hands are as sweet and tiny as a child's. She is just like a saint in a picture, and she is good, and feels for poor people. I began to beg her for help.—May God give her health!—And she said, "I will do," she said, "whatever lies in my power." And she has such a pretty little voice that when she speaks one does feel pleased. So then I began to tell her that there are unhappy people in Pognębin, and she said, "Not only in Pognębin," and then I burst into tears, and she too. And then the Count

came in, and he saw that she was crying, so he would have liked to take her and give her a little kiss. Gentlefolk aren't like us! Then she said to him, "Do what you can for this woman." And he said, "Anything in the world, whatever you wish."—May the Mother of God bless her, that lovely creature, may She bless her with children and with health!—The Count said at once: "You must be heavily in debt, if you have fallen into the hands of the Germans, but," he said, "I will help you, and also against Just."'

Bartek began to scratch his neck.

'But the Germans have got hold of him too.'

'What of that? His wife is rich. They could buy all the Germans in Pognębin now, so it was easy for him to talk like that. "The election," he said, "is coming on before long, and people had better take care not to vote for Germans; but I will make short work of Just and Boege." And the lady put her arm round his neck,—and the Count asked after you, and said, "if he is ill, I will speak to the doctor about giving him a certificate to show that he is unfit to be imprisoned now. If they don't let him off altogether," he said, "he will be imprisoned in the winter, but he is needed now for working the crops." Do you hear? The Count was in the town yesterday, and invited the doctor to come on a visit to Pognębin to-day. He's not a German. He'll write

the certificate. In the winter you'll sit in prison like a king, you'll be warm, and they'll give you meat to eat; and now you are going home to work, and Just will be repaid, and possibly the Count won't want any interest, and if we can't give it all back in the Autumn, I'll beg it from the lady. May the Mother of God bless her. . . . Do you hear?'

'She is a good lady. There are not many such!' Bartek said at once.

'You must fall at her feet, I tell you,—but no, for then that lovely head would bend to you! If only God grants us a crop. And do you see where the help has come from? Was it from the Germans? Did they give a single penny for your stupid head? Well, they gave you as much as it was worth! Fall at the lady's feet, I say!'

'I can't do otherwise,' Bartek replied resolutely.

Fortune seemed to smile on the conqueror once more. He was informed some days later that for reasons of health he would be released from prison until the winter. He was ordered to appear before the Magistrate. The man who, bayonet in hand, had seized flags and guns, now began to fear a uniform more than death. A deep, unconscious feeling was growing in his mind that he was being persecuted, that they could do as they liked with him, and that there was some mighty, yet malevolent and evil power above him, which,

if he resisted, would crush him. So there he stood before the Magistrate, as formerly before Steinmetz, upright, his body drawn in, his chest thrown forward, not daring to breathe. There were some officers present also: they represented war and the military prison to Bartek. The officers looked at him through their gold eye-glasses with the pride and disdain befitting Prussian officers towards a private soldier and Polish peasant. He stood holding his breath, and the Magistrate said something in a commanding tone. He did not ask or persuade, he commanded and threatened. A Member had died in Berlin, and the writs for a fresh election had been issued.

'You Polish dog, just you dare to vote for Count Jarzyński, just you dare!'

At this the officers knitted their brows into threatening leonine wrinkles. One, lighting his cigar, repeated after the Magistrate 'Just you dare!' and Bartek the Conqueror's heart died within him. When he heard the order given, 'Go!' he made a half turn to the left, went out and took breath. They told him to vote for Herr Schulberg of Great Krzywda; he paid no attention to the command, but took a deep breath. For he was going to Pognębin, he could be at home during harvest time, the Count had promised to pay Just. He walked out of the town; the ripening cornfields surrounded him on every side, the

heavy blades hurtling one another in the wind, and murmuring with a sound dear to the peasant's ear. Bartek was still weak, but the sun warmed him. 'Ah! how beautiful the world is!' this worn-out soldier thought.

It was not much further to Pogn̨ebin.

CHAPTER X

'THE Election! The Election!'

Countess Marya Jarzyński's head was full of it, and she thought, talked and dreamt of nothing else.

'You are a great politician,' an aristocratic neighbour said to her, kissing her small hands in a snake-like way. But the 'great politician' blushed like a cherry, and answered with a beautiful smile:—

'Oh, we only do what we can!'

'Count Józef will be elected,' the nobleman said with conviction, and the 'great politician' answered:—

'I should wish it very much, though not alone for Józef's sake, but' (here the 'great politician' dropped her imprudent hands again), 'for the common cause . . .'

'By God! Bismarck is in the right!' cried the nobleman, kissing the tiny hands once more. After which they proceeded to discuss the canvassing. The nobleman himself undertook Krzywda Dolna and Mizerów, (Great Krzywda was lost,

for Herr Schulberg owned all the property there), and Countess Marya was to occupy herself specially with Pognębin. She was all aglow with the *rôle* she was to fill, and she certainly lost no time. She was daily to be seen at the cottages on the main road, holding her skirt with one hand, her parasol with the other, while from under her skirt peeped her tiny feet, tripping enthusiastically in the great political cause. She went into the cottages, she said to the people working on the road, 'The Lord help you!' She visited the sick, made herself agreeable to the people, and helped where she could. She would have done the same without politics, for she had a kind heart, but she did it all the more on this account. Why should not she also contribute her share to the political cause? But she did not dare confess to her husband that she had an irresistible desire to attend the village meeting. In imagination she had even planned the speech she would make at the meeting. And what a speech it would be! What a speech! True, she would certainly never dare to make it, but if she dared—why then! Consequently when the news reached Pognębin that the Authorities had prohibited the meeting, the 'great politician' burst into a fit of anger, tore one handkerchief up completely, and had red eyes all day. In vain her husband begged her not to 'demean' herself to such a degree; next day the canvassing was

carried on with still greater fervour. Nothing stopped Countess Marya now. She visited thirteen cottages in one day, and talked so loudly against the Germans that her husband was obliged to check her. But there was no danger. The people welcomed her gladly, they kissed her hands and smiled at her, for she was so pretty and her cheeks were so rosy that wherever she went she brought brightness with her. Thus she came to Bartek's cottage also. Although Łysek did not bark at her, Magda in her excitement hit him on the head with a stick.

'Oh lady, my beautiful lady, my dear lady!' cried Magda, seizing her hands.

In accordance with his resolve, Bartek threw himself at her feet, while little Franek first kissed her hand, then stuck his thumb into his mouth and lost himself in whole-hearted admiration.

'I hope'—the young lady said after the first greetings were over,—'I hope, my friend Bartek, that you will vote for my husband, and not for Herr Schulberg.'

'Oh my dear lady!' Magda exclaimed, 'who would vote for Schulberg?—Give him the ten plagues! The lady must excuse me, but when one gets talking about the Germans, one can't help what one says.'

'My husband has just told me that he has repaid Just.'

'May God bless him!' Here Magda turned to Bartek. 'Why do you stand there like a post? I must beg the lady's pardon, but he's wonderfully dumb.'

'You will vote for my husband, won't you?' the lady asked. 'You are Poles, and we are Poles, so we will hold to one another.'

'I should throttle him if he didn't vote for him,' Magda said. 'Why do you stand there like a post? He's wonderfully dumb. Bestir yourself a bit!'

Bartek again kissed the lady's hand, but he remained silent, and looked as black as night. The Magistrate was in his mind.

The day of the Election drew near, and arrived. Count Jarzyński was certain of victory. All the neighbourhood assembled at Pognębin. After voting the gentlemen returned there from the town to wait for the priest, who was to bring the news. Afterwards there was to be a dinner, but in the evening the noble couple were going to Posen, and subsequently to Berlin also. Several villages in the Electoral Division had already polled the day beforehand. The result would be made known on this day. The company was in a cheerful frame of mind. The young lady was slightly nervous, yet full of hope and smiles, and made such a charming hostess that everyone agreed Count Józef had found a real treasure

in Prussia. This treasure was quite unable at present to keep quiet in one place, and ran from guest to guest, asking each for the hundredth time to assure her that 'Józio would be elected.' She was not actually ambitious, and it was not out of vanity that she wished to be the wife of a Member, but she was dreaming in her young mind that she and her husband together had a real mission to accomplish. So her heart beat as quickly as at the moment of her wedding, and her pretty little face was lighted up with joy. Skilfully manœuvering amidst her guests, she approached her husband, drew him by the hand, and whispered in his ear, like a child, nicknaming someone, 'The Hon. Member!' He smiled, and both were happy at the most trifling word. They both felt a great wish to give one another a warm embrace, but owing to the presence of their guests, this could not be. Everyone, however, was looking out of the window every moment, for the question was a really important one. The former Member, who had died, was a Pole, and this was the first time in this Division that the Germans had put up a candidate of their own. Their military success had evidently given them courage, but just for that reason it the more concerned those assembled at the manor house at Pognębin to secure the election of their candidate. Before dinner there was no lack of patriotic

speeches, which especially moved the young hostess who was unaccustomed to them. Now and then she suffered an access of fear. Supposing there should be a mistake in counting the votes? But there would surely not only be Germans serving on the Committee! The principal landowners would simply flock to her husband, so that it would be possible to dispense with counting the votes. She had heard this a hundred times, but she still wished to hear it! Ah! and would it not make all the difference whether the local population had an enemy in Parliament, or someone to champion their cause? It would soon be decided,—in a short moment, in fact,—for a cloud of dust was rising from the road.

'The priest is coming! The priest is coming!' reiterated those present. The lady grew pale. Excitement was visible on every face. They were certain of victory, all the same this final moment made their hearts beat more rapidly. But it was not the priest, it was the steward returning from the town on horseback. Perhaps he might know something? He tied his horse to the gate post, and hurried to the house. The guests and the hostess rushed into the hall.

'Is there any news?—Is there any? Has our friend been elected?—What?—Come here!—Do you know for certain?—Has the result been declared?'

The questions rose and fell like rockets, but the man threw his cap into the air.

'The Count is elected!'

The lady sat down on a bench abruptly, and pressed her hand to her fast beating heart.

'Hurrah! Hurrah!' the neighbours shouted, 'Hurrah!'

The servants rushed out from the kitchen.

'Hurrah!' Down with the Germans! Long live the Member! And my lady the Member's wife!'

'But the priest?' someone asked.

'He will be here directly;' the steward answered, 'they are still counting . . .'

'Let us have dinner!' the Hon. Member cried.

'Hurrah!' several people repeated.

They all walked back again from the hall to the drawing room. Congratulations to the host and hostess were now offered more calmly; the lady herself, however, did not know how to restrain her joy, and disregarding the presence of others, threw her arm round her husband's neck. But they thought none the worse of her for this; on the contrary, they were all much touched.

'Well, we still survive!' the neighbour from Mizerów said.

At this moment there was a clatter along the corridor, and the priest entered the drawing room, followed by old Maciej, of Pognębin.

'Welcome! Welcome!' they all cried. 'Well, —how great?'

The priest was silent a moment; then as it were into the very face of this universal joy he suddenly hurled the two harsh, brief words:

'Schulberg—elected!'

A moment of astonishment followed, a volley of hurried and anxious questions, to which the priest again replied:

'Schulberg is elected!'

'How?—What has happened?—By what means?—The steward said it was not so.—What has happened?'

Meanwhile Count Jarzyński was leading poor Countess Marya out of the room, who was biting her hankerchief, not to burst into tears or to faint.

'Oh what a misfortune, what a misfortune!' the assembled guests repeated, striking their foreheads.

A dull sound like people shouting for joy rose at that moment from the direction of the village. The Germans of Pognębin were thus gleefully celebrating their victory.

Count and Countess Jarzyński returned to the drawing room. He could be heard saying to his wife at the door, 'Il faut faire bonne mine,' and she had stopped crying already. Her eyes were dry and very red.

'Will you tell us how it was?' the host asked quietly.

'How could it be otherwise, Sir,' old Maciej said, 'seeing that even the Pognębin peasants voted for Schulberg?'

'Who did so?'

'What? Those here?'

'Why, yes; I myself and everyone saw Bartek Słowik vote for Schulberg.'

'Bartek Słowik?' the lady said.

'Why, yes. The others are at him now for it. The man is rolling on the ground, howling, and his wife is scolding him. But I myself saw how he voted.'

'From such an enlightened village!' the neighbour from Mizerów said.

'You see, Sir,' Maciej said, 'others who were in the war also voted as he did. They say that they were ordered—'

'That's cheating, pure cheating!—The election is void—Compulsion!—Swindling!' cried different voices.

The dinner at the Pognębin manor house was not cheerful that day.

The host and hostess left in the evening, but not as yet for Berlin, only for Dresden.

Meanwhile Bartek sat in his cottage, miserable, sworn at, ill-treated and hated, a stranger even

to his own wife, for even she had not spoken a word to him all day.

In the autumn God granted a crop, and Herr Just, who had just come into possession of Bartek's farm, felt pleased, for he had not done at all a bad stroke of business.

Some months later three people walked out of Pognębin to the town, a peasant, his wife, and child. The peasant was very bent, more like an old man than an able-bodied one. They were going to the town because they could not find work at Pognębin. It was raining. The woman was sobbing bitterly at losing her cottage, and her native place. The peasant was silent. The road was empty, there was not a carriage, not a human being to be seen; the cross alone, wet from the rain, stretched its arms above them.— The rain fell more and more heavily, dimming the light.

Bartek, Magda and Franek were going to the town because the victor of Gravelotte and Sedan had to serve his term of imprisonment during the winter, on account of the affair with Boege.

Count and Countess Jarzyński continued to enjoy themselves in Dresden.

TWILIGHT

STEFAN ŻEROMSKI

THE sun was gliding into a lustrous copper haze, drawn in wide streaks, like transparent dust, across the distant scene. It sank behind some thick red firs left standing at the edge of a clearing and behind the dark trunks which lay rotting on the hillside. Its beams still lighted the corners of a cottage, gilding it and colouring it scarlet; they penetrated the folds of grey clouds, and glittered on the water.

A recent storm had laid the marshy plains and newly cultivated woodlands partly under water. Here and on the furrows of the stubble-fields and the fresh autumn ploughing the puddles turned red and their irridescent surface became like molten glass, while entrancing violet shadows, dazzling to the sight, fell on the grey, beaten-down clods; the sand hills turned yellow; the weeds growing on the banks, the bushes at the edge of the field paths, all borrowed some unwonted momentary colour.

In a deep hollow surrounded by sparsely wooded hills to the east, west and south ran a little brook,

which overflowed into bays, swamps, shallows and creeks. Tangles of reeds grew at the water's edge, lank bulrushes, sweet-flags, and clumps of willows. The still, red water was now shining in formless pale-green patches from under the large leaves of the water-lilies and coarse water-weeds.

A flight of teals was hovering above with outstretched necks, and broke in upon the silence with the swish of their wings. Otherwise everything was still. Even the glassy blue dragon-flies, which had been hovering ceaselessly on their gossamer wings round the stems of the bulrushes, had disappeared. The untiring water-flies alone yet strayed over the illuminated surface of the swamps on their stilt-like legs . . .And there were two human beings at work.

The marshes belonged to the manor house. Formerly the young owner, accompanied by his spaniel, had floundered through them, shooting ducks and snipe, which were to be found there before he cut down all the woods. He left quite half of the land uncultivated, and having very quickly run through his property, he found no means of supporting himself until he went to Warsaw, where he was now selling soda-water at a stall.

When a new and prudent owner appeared, he inspected the fields, stick in hand, and frequently stood still on the marshes, rubbing his nose.

He fumbled with his hands in the swamp, dug holes, measured, sniffed,—till he invented a strange thing. He ordered the bailiff to hire labourers daily to dig peat, to heap barrow-loads of the mud on to the fields, and to go on digging a hole until it was large enough for a pond. He was to make a dyke, and to choose a lower position for a second pond, till there were some thirteen in all; then to cut trenches; to let the water down, build water-gates, and set fish in the ponds.

Walek Gibała, a day labourer without any land of his own, who was working for wages in the neighbouring village, was hired to cart away the peat. Gibała had been groom to the former landlord, but had not stayed on with the new one. In the first place, the new landlord and the new steward had lowered the wages and allowances, and, in the second place, they made an enquiry into everything that was stolen. In the time of the former landlord each groom used half a bushel of oats for a pair of horses, and took the rest in the evening to the 'Berlin' Inn, in exchange for tobacco or a drop of brandy. However, this business had come to an end at once when the new steward appeared, and since he justly laid the blame of it on Walek, he had boxed his ears, and dismissed him from his service.

So from that time Walek and his wife had lived

on their daily earnings in the village, because he could not find a situation; he was not likely even to apply for one, so thoroughly had the steward taken his character away. At harvest time they both earned something here and there from the peasants, but in winter and early spring they suffered terribly,—indescribably, from hunger. Large and bony, with iron muscles, the man was as thin as a board, with an ashen look, round-shouldered and weakened by privation. The woman—like a woman—supported herself by her neighbours; she sold mushrooms, raspberries and strawberries to the manor house, or to the Jews, and at least thus earned a loaf of wheat-bread. But, without food, she was no match for the man at threshing. When the bailiff gave the order for digging in the meadows, the eyes of both sparkled. The steward himself promised thirty kopeks for digging two cubic yards.

Walek kept his wife occupied with the digging every day and all day. She loaded the wheel-barrow, and he wheeled the mud on to the field along planks thrown across the swamp. They worked feverishly. They had two large, deep wheelbarrows, and before Walek had brought back the empty one, the second was already full; then he threw the strap round his shoulder and pushed the barrow up the hill. The iron wheel creaked horribly. The liquid, dark, rank slime,

thick with marsh-weeds, overflowed and trickled down on to the man's bare knees, as the wheel-barrows were tilted from plank to plank; it penetrated to his neck and shoulders, marking his shirt with a dark, evil-smelling streak. His arms ached at the elbows, his feet were painful and stiff from being continually plunged into the mud, but—with a hard day's work, they dug out four cubic yards:—and he knew that he had sixty kopeks in his pocket.

They were hopeful, for they had earned thirty roubles by the end of the autumn. They paid their rent, bought a cask of pickled cabbage, five bushels of potatoes, a 'sukmana,'[1] boots, some aprons and homespun for the woman, and linen for shirts. Thus they could last till the spring, when they would be able to earn by threshing and weaving at other people's houses.

All of a sudden the steward considered it excessive to give thirty kopeks for two cubic yards. It struck him that no one would be tempted to patter about in a swamp from daybreak to nightfall unless on the verge of starvation, and these people had undertaken it without hesitation. 'Twenty kopeks is enough,' he said, 'if not,—well, go without.'

There was nothing to be earned at this time of year, and the manor house had enough of its own

[1] Peasant's dress.

people to attend to the threshing and machinery; —it was no use being fastidious in the matter. After this announcement Walek went to the inn, and made a beast of himself. Next day he beat his wife, and dragged her out to work for him.

From that time forward—beginning when it grew light—they dug out the four cubic yards, never stopping work from daybreak until night.

And now, indeed, night was drawing on from afar. The distant light-blue woods were growing dark, and melting into grey gloom. The radiance on the waters was extinguished. Immense shadows from the red firs standing towards the north fell on the summits of the hills, and along the clearings. The tree trunks alone remained crimson here and there, and then the stones. Small, fugitive rays were reflected from these points of light, and, falling into the deep wastes created among objects by the half-darkness, were refracted, quivered for an instant, and went out in turn. The trees and bushes lost their convexity and brilliance, their natural colours mingled with the grey distance, and they appeared only as flat and completely black forms with weird contours.

A thick mist was already gathering in the low-lying country, chilling the man through as he worked. The darkness was coming on in unseen waves, creeping along the slopes of the hills, gathering to itself the dreary colours of the

stubble-fields, the water-courses, the clefts in the hills, and the rocks.

As the waves of mist met, others—white, transparent, and scarcely visible—which rose from the marshes, crept along in streaks, winding in balls round the undergrowth, trembling and curling over the surface of the water. The cold, damp wind drove the mist along the bottom of the valley, till it was stretched out flat like a face on the canvas of a picture.

'The mist is coming on,' Walkowa murmured. It was that moment of twilight, when every form seems to be visibly reducing itself to dust and nothingness, when a grey emptiness spreads over the surface of the earth, looks into the eyes, and oppresses the heart with unconscious sorrow. Terror seized Walkowa. Her hair stood on end, and a shudder passed through her body. The mists rose like a living thing, stealthily crawling over towards her; they came up from behind, retreated, lay in wait, and again crept forward in more impetuous pursuit. Her hands were clammy with the damp, it soaked through her skin to the bone, it irritated her throat, and tickled her chest. Then she remembered her child, whom she had not seen since noon. He was lying asleep,—locked up in a room quite alone,—in a cradle of lime wood, suspended from the beams of the ceiling by birch-twigs. Surely

he was crying now,—choking,—sobbing? The mother heard that cry, as wailing and pitiful as that of a solitary bird in a desert place. It rang in her ears, it tormented a particular spot in her brain, it tore at her heart. She had not thought about him all day, for her hard work had scattered all her thoughts, in fact, it had drained and annihilated her power of thinking; but now the uncanny sensations caused by the twilight compelled her to concentrate herself and fasten her mind upon this small morsel of humanity.

'Walek' she said timidly, when the man brought up the barrow, 'shall I be off to the cottage and finish scraping the potatoes?'

Gibała did not answer, as though he had not heard. He seized the barrow and set forth. When he returned, the woman implored again: 'Walek, shall I be off?'

'Eh?' he grumbled carelessly.

She knew what his anger meant; she knew that he could catch a man under the ribs, gather up his skin in handfuls, and, having shaken him once or twice, throw him down like a stone among the rushes. She knew he was capable of tearing the handkerchief from her head, twisting her hair in a knot round his fist and dragging her in terror along the road; or, in a fit of absent-mindedness, of pulling his spade out of the swamp

quickly, and cutting her across the head without considering—whether it had hit, or not hit her.

But impatient anxiety, kindled to the point of pain, rose above the fear of punishment. At moments the woman thought of running away; it only meant creeping into the little ravine, leaping across the brooklet, and then making straight through the fields and plantations. As she stooped and filled her barrow, she was already escaping in thought, leaping like a marten, scarcely feeling the pain of running barefoot across the stubble, overgrown with thick blackthorn and blackberries. The sharp clods would sting not only her feet but her heart. She would come running to the cottage, and open the bolt with the wooden key; the warmth and close air of the room would meet her face; she would clasp the cradle . . . Walek would kill her when he returned to the cottage,—beat her to death:—but what then? That would be for later . . .

As soon, however, as Walek emerged from the mist, she was seized afresh by a dread of his fists. Again she humbly begged him, although she knew that her tormentor would not set her free:

'Perhaps the baby is dead in there.'

He answered nothing, threw down the strap of the barrow from his shoulder, approached his

wife, and, by a movement of the head, pointed to the stakes up to which they must dig that day. Then he seized the spade, and began to throw mud into his barrow, time after time. He worked without thinking, quickly,—as fast as he could breathe. When he had filled the barrow he pushed it forward, running at top speed, and said as he left :

' Push yours too, you lazy brute . . .'

She took this mild concession to the object of her love, this brutal goodness, this hardness and severity as if it had been a caress. For it would be possible to finish the work far sooner if they both wheeled the mud. Rapidly and impetuously she now imitated his movements, like a monkey, and shovelled up the mud four times more quickly, no longer drawing on her muscular peasant's strength, but on her nervous power. Her chest rattled, dazzling colours passed under her eyelids, she felt faint, and large burning tears fell from her eyes into that cold, evil-smelling filth,—tears of unheeded pain. Every time she struck the spade into the ground she looked to see if it was still far to the stakes; her barrow ready, she seized it, and ran at full tilt after the man.

The mists rose high; they drew past the rushes and stood over the tops of the alders in an unmoving wall. The trees loomed through them as patches of indefinite colour, astonishingly large,

but imperfect forms, which ran across the deep gorge like monstrous, terrible apparitions.

Their heads fell forward; their hands executed a uniform movement; their bodies were bowed to the ground . . .

The wheels of the barrows clattered and whined. Waves of mist like milk when poured into water, swayed amid the darkening hills.

The evening star shone low in the sky, and tremblingly threw its feeble light across the darkness.

TEMPTATION

STEFAN ŻEROMSKI

COUNTESS Anna Krzywosąd - Nasławska's youngest son had decided to take Holy Orders. From boyhood he had shown an unusual fondness for prayer, had been silent and obedient, and worn an earnest, pious expression. He had been educated in Rome under the eye of a distant cousin—a Cardinal—and completed his course at the seminary there with distinction, when barely twenty. Having not yet attained the proper age to hold any spiritual office, he went back to his own country for the first time for many years, and stayed at his mother's house.

He occupied a corner room in the mansion, as cold and damp as any monastic cell; he slept on the ground, fasted unceasingly, read Latin books, very probably scourged himself at nights, and wore a hair shirt under his shabby cassock. He was unspeakably good and gentle, forgave injuries, and was over-modest.

When he sat down, it was on the very edge of the chair, as if anxious that when he rose

quickly his cassock should hinder him and make him move like a priest; he walked on tiptoe as if a mystic heel protected him from the dust of the earth; he shunned society, he murmured a prayer at the sight of a village girl.

Every day at dawn he left the house, and went into the fields. He felt that there he could be in closest communication with his Creator, there ecstatic visions came to him most clearly. He followed the beaten track through numberless rye-fields to the upland, where a half-ruined little chapel lay hidden in the shade of the pine forest.

One morning he went there as usual. The landscape was still buried in the night-mist, but a violet streak of daybreak had begun to spread on the horizon. The bearded rye brushed against his knees and scattered large dewdrops, yet the pathway was not damp, being sheltered by the full drooping ears. The corn, feebly illumined by the early morning light, rose in great waves along the hill, where the undulating line of the fields showed against the wood. The scent of earth and ripening corn hung on the breeze, bringing a sense of health, strength, and youth. From the dark gloom of the huge trees, whose tops were beginning to break up the expanse of dawning blue, came the keen, damp breath of the forest. The seminarist walked along slowly and lazily, passing his hand over the surface of the rye.

Sky larks and crested larks rose at his feet, and dropped again like stones into the thickly-growing corn.

The dawn was now tinging the horizon with a rosy light; it burst forth like a wide flash of lightning, illuminating the rifts and curves in the dark clouds which lay idly over the wood. Unexpectedly hundreds of red firs, crowning the summit of the hill, emerged tall and grand from the night, their boughs standing out prominently against the transparent background of blue, as if stretching out their arms to the approaching sun.

Suddenly a thrill passed through the earth. The next moment a puff of wind, the forerunner of daybreak, stirred the boughs of the firs, and announced alike to plant, to grass, and corn—the coming of the sun.

It seemed as if the earth were quivering, as if her heart began to beat. Then the wind spread its wings, and hovered over the scented trunks, over the osiers and corn in the distance. A long, soothing moment of death-like silence followed, and then that mysterious moment of early dawn, when each living plant glows in its every part as if on fire.

The student walked with his face turned eastwards. Words of prayer rose from his heart to his lips as the sap rises to the bark of the pines when Spring comes. He went up to the little

chapel, opened the grey wooden door, studded with nails, and fell on his face with outstretched hands before the picture of Christ, clumsily drawn by a rustic hand.

He felt as if his soul had fled from earth to the very Throne of God. The scales had fallen from his eyes in a moment: he was gazing on the face of the Eternal.

All at once a rough, coarse peasant's song was heard:

'It was then that I liked you best, Hanka,
When you bleached yourself in the fields, in the fields, like a gosling.'

This was answered by a woman's voice, approaching from a distance:

'I did not bleach myself, I bleached a linen shirt,
But you, Kaśka, thought that I was painted.'

The young man rose from the ground, and stood at the door of the chapel. He saw a sturdy farmer's lad in shirt sleeves, bare-foot, in a straw hat, and loaded like a horse, with juniper wood. This strapping fellow was taking up a kilo of roots—digging out bushes with the clods, and moistening his hands in the branches. A girl was going along the path, carrying a load of weeds on her back. The corners of her petticoat were turned up and tucked into her belt, her

broad shoulders were bent together under the heavy burden, only her head, tied round with a red handkerchief, was raised towards the hill where the lad was working. When she reached the turn of the path, he stopped her, pulled down the hem of her skirt from her waist, and laid her bundle on the ground. She pushed him away with her hands, laughing.

The student shaded his eyes with his hand, but dropped it again the next minute, as the sound of the two singing a fresh song echoed through the glade. It was strange music. The wood, like a tuned string, seemed to quiver in harmony with the sound of those two voices:

'In the garden is a cherry tree,
In the orchard there are two;
I have loved you, Hanuś, since you were small,
Nobody else but you.'

They went down into the hollow through the corn, which reached up to their heads, bent towards one another. Those two heads stood out in sharp relief against the dark rye, while the giant, brazen shield of the sun was rising over the ridge. They walked thus for a long time, never completely hidden by the corn.

Tears flowed from under the young man's closed eyes, and he clenched his hands convul-

sively. Words unknown to him, words known as longing and the desire for love, forced themselves unnoticed to his lips.

In a vision he saw moist eyes and a girl's long braided hair rising and sinking in some sea cavern. An unknown force, inexpressibly sweet, a force which could be neither expelled nor conquered, rose within him, carrying him far away into space. His soul threw off its fetters, and rushed forth in its wild freedom, as a colt starts for a mad gallop . . .

SRUL—FROM LUBARTÓW

ADAM SZYMAŃSKI

I

IT happened in the year, . . .; but no matter what year. Suffice it to say that it happened, and that it happened at Yakutsk in the beginning of November, about a month after my arrival at that citadel of frosts. The thermometer was down to 35 degrees Réamur. I was therefore thinking anxiously of the coming fate of my nose and ears, which, fresh from the West, had been making silent but perceptible protests against their compulsory acclimatization, and to-day were to be submitted to yet further trials. These latest trials were due to the fact that one of the men in our colony, Peter Kurp, nicknamed Bałdyga,[1] had died in the local hospital two days before, and early that morning we were going to do him a last service, by laying his wasted body in the half-frozen ground.

[1] Bałdyga means 'lump' or 'clumsy lout.'

I was only waiting for an acquaintance, who was to tell me the hour of the funeral, and I had not long to wait. Having wrapped up my nose and ears with the utmost care, I set out with the others to the hospital.

The hospital was outside the town. In the courtyard, and at some distance from the other buildings, stood a small shed—the mortuary.

In this mortuary lay Bałdyga's body.

When the doors were opened, we entered, and the scene within made a painful impression on the few of us present. We were about ten people, possibly a few more, and we all involuntarily looked at one another : we were standing opposite a cold and bare reality, not veiled by any vestige of pretence . . .

In the shed,—which possessed neither table nor stool, nothing but walls white with hoarfrost and a floor covered with snow,—lay a large bearded corpse, equally white, and tied up in some kind of sheet or shirt. This was Bałdyga.

The body, which was completely frozen, had been brought near the light to the door, where the coffin was standing ready.

Never shall I forget Bałdyga's face as I saw it then with the light full upon it, and washed by the snow. There was something strange and indescribably sad in the rough, strongly marked countenance ; the large pupils and projecting eye-

balls seemed to look far away into the distance towards the stern frosty sky.

'That man,—he was a good sort,' one of those present said to me, noticing the impression which the sight of Bałdyga made on me. 'He was always steady and industrious; people who were hard up used to go to him and he would help them. But there never was anyone so obstinate as Kurp: he believed to the last that he would go back to the Narev.[1] Yet before the end came it was plain that he knew he would never get there.'

Meanwhile the petrified body had been laid in the coffin, and placed upon the small one-horse Yakut sledge.

Then the tailor's wife—a person versed in religious practices,—undertook the office of priest for such time as we could give her, and began to sing 'Ave Maria,' while we joined in with voices broken with emotion. After this we proceeded to the cemetery.

We walked quickly; the frost was invigorating, and made us hasten our steps. At last we reached the cemetery. We each threw a handful of frozen earth on to the coffin . . . A few deft strokes of the spade . . . and in a moment only a small freshly turned mound of earth remained to bear witness to Bałdyga's yet recent existence in this

[1] The river near his home.

world. This witness would not last long, however,—scarcely a few months. The spring would come, and, thawed by the sun, the mound on the grave would sink and become even with the rest of the ground, and grass and weeds would grow upon it. After a year or two the witnesses of the funeral would die, or be dispersed throughout the wide world, and if even the mother who bore him were to search for him, she would no longer find a trace on the earth. But, indeed, none would seek for the dead man, nor even a dog ask for him.

Bałdyga had known this; we knew it too: and we dispersed to our houses in silence.

The day following the funeral the frost was yet more severe. There was not a single building to be seen on the opposite side of the fairly narrow street in which I lived, for a thick mist of snow crystals overspread the earth, like a cloud. The sun could not penetrate this mist, and although there was not a living soul in the street, the air was so highly condensed through the extreme cold that I continually heard the metallic sound of creaking snow, the sharp reports of the walls and ground cracking in the frost, or the moaning song of a Yakut. Evidently those Yakut frosts were beginning, which reduce the most terrible Arctic cold to insignificance. They fill human beings with unspeakable dread. Every

living thing feels its utter helplessness, and although it cowers down and shrinks into itself for protection, knows quite well—like the cur worried by fierce mastiffs,—that all is in vain, for sooner or later the inexorable foe is bound to be victorious.

And Bałdyga was continually in my mind, as if he were alive. I had sat for hours at my half-finished task. Somehow I could not stick to work; the pen fell from my hand, and my unruly thoughts ranged far away beyond the snowy frontier and frosty ground. In vain I appealed to my reason, in vain I repeated wholesome advice to myself for the tenth time. Hitherto I had offered some resistance to the sickness which had consumed me for several weeks; to-day I felt completely overcome and helpless. Home-sickness was devouring and making pitiless havoc of me.

I had been unable to resist dreaming so many times already; was it likely I should withstand the temptation to-day? The temptation was stronger, and I was weaker than usual.

So begone frost and snow, begone the existence of Yakutsk! I threw down my pen, and surrounding myself with clouds of tobacco smoke, plunged into the waters of feverish imagination.

And how it carried me away! . . . My thoughts fled rapidly to the far West, across

morasses and steppes, mountains and rivers, across countless lands and cities, and spread a scene of true enchantment before me. There on the Vistula lay my native plains, free from misery and human passions, beautiful and harmonious. My lips cannot utter, nor my pen describe their charm!

I saw the golden fields, the emerald meadows; the dense forests murmured their old legends to me.

I heard the rustle of the waving corn; the chirping of the feathered poets; the sound of the giant oaks as they haughtily bid defiance to the gale.

And the air seemed permeated by the scent of those aromatic forests, and those blossoming fields, adorned in virgin freshness by the blue cornflowers and that sweetest beauty of Spring,—the innocent violet.

. . . Every single nerve felt the caress of my native air . . . I was touched by the life-giving power of the sun's rays; and although the frost outside creaked more fiercely, and showed its teeth at me on the window panes more menacingly, yet the blood circulated in my veins more rapidly, my head burnt, and I sat as if spellbound, deaf, no longer seeing or hearing anything round me . . .

II

I did not notice that the door opened and someone entered my room, neither did I see the circles of vapour, which form in such numbers every time a door is opened that they obscure the face of the person entering. I did not feel the cold: it penetrates human dwellings here with a sort of shameless, premeditated violence. In fact, I had seen or heard nothing until suddenly I felt a man close to me, and even before catching sight of him, found myself involuntarily putting him the usual Yakut question:

'Toch nado?' ('What do you want?')

'If you please, Sir, I am a hawker,' was the answer.

I looked up. Although he was dressed in ox and stag's hide, I had no doubt that a typical Polish Jew from a small town stood before me. Anyone who had seen him at Lossitz or Sarnak would have recognized him as easily in Yakut as in Patagonian costume. I knew him at once. And since, as I have said, I was as yet only semi-conscious, and had asked the question almost mechanically, the Jew now standing before me

did not interrupt my train of thought too harshly; the contrast was, therefore, not too disagreeable. Quite the reverse. I gazed into the well-known features with a certain degree of pleasure; the Jew's appearance at that moment seemed quite natural, since it carried me in thought and feeling to my native land, and the few Polish words sounded dear to my ear. Half dreaming still, I looked at him kindly.

The Jew stood still for a moment, then turned, and retreating to the door, began to pull off his multifarious coverings.

Then I came to myself, and realized that I had not yet answered him, and that my sagacious countryman, quite misinterpreting my silence, was anxious to dispose of his wares to me. I hastened to undeceive him.

'In heaven's name, man, what are you doing?' I cried quickly, 'I do not want to buy anything; I am not wanting anything. Do not unload yourself in vain, and go away with God's blessing!'

The Jew stopped undoing his things, and after a moment's consideration, came towards me with his long fur coat[1] half trailing behind him, and began to mumble quickly in broken sentences: 'It's all right; I know you won't buy anything, Sir. I saw you, for I have been here a long time, a very long time . . . I didn't know before

[1] 'Docha.'

that you had come . . . You come from Warsaw, don't you, Sir? They only told me yesterday evening that you had been here four months already; what a pity it was such a time before I heard of it! I should have come at once. I have been searching for you to-day for an hour, Sir. I went quite to the end of the town,—and there's such a frost here,—confound it! . . . If you will allow me Sir,—I won't interrupt for long? . . . Only just a few words . . .'

'What do you want of me?'

'I should only like to have a little chat with you, Sir.'

This answer did not greatly surprise me. I had already come across not a few people, Jews among them, who had called solely for the purpose of 'having a little chat' with a man recently arrived from their country. Those who came were interested in the most varied topics imaginable; there were the inquisitive gossipers pure and simple, there were the people who only enquired after their relations, and there were the politicians, including those whose heads had been turned. Among those who came, however, politics always played a specially important part. So it did not surprise me, I repeat, to hear the wish expressed by a fresh stranger, and although I should have been glad to rid my cottage as quickly as possible of the unpleasant odour of the ox-hide

coat,—badly tanned, as usual— I begged him in a friendly way to take it off and sit down.

The Jew was evidently pleased. He took a seat beside me at once and I could now observe him closely.

All the usual features of the Jewish race were united in the face beside me: the large, slightly crooked nose and penetrating hawk's eyes, the pointed beard of the colour of a well-ripened pumpkin, the low forehead, surrounded by thick hair; all these my guest possessed. And yet, strange to say, the haggard face expressed a certain frank sincerity, and did not make a disagreeable impression on me.

'Tell me where you come from, what your name is, what you are doing here, and why you wish to see me?'

'Please, Sir, I am Srul, from Lubartów. Perhaps you know it,—just a stone's throw from Lublin?—Well, at home everyone thinks it a long way from there, and formerly I thought so too. But now,' he added with emphasis, 'we know that Lubartów is quite close to Lublin, a mere stone's throw.'

'And have you been here long?'

'Very long; three good years.'

'That is not so very long; there are people who have lived here for over 20 years, and I met an old man from Vilna in the road, who had been

here close upon 50 years. Those have really been a long time.'

But the Jew snubbed me. 'As to them, I can't say. I only know that I have been here a long time.'

'You must certainly live quite alone, if the time seems so long to you?'

'With my wife and child—my daughter. I had four children when I set out, but, may the Lord preserve us, it was such a long way, we were travelling a whole year. Do you know what such a journey means, Sir? . . . Three children died in one week—died of travelling, as it were. Three children! . . . An easy thing to say! . . . There was nowhere even to bury them, for there was no cemetery of ours there . . . I am a Husyt,' he added more quietly. 'You know what that means Sir? . . . I keep the Law strictly . . . and yet God punishes me like this . . .' He grew silent with emotion.

'My friend,' I tried to say to console him a little,—'no doubt under such circumstances it is difficult to remember that it makes no difference; but all earth is hallowed.'

But the Jew jumped as if he had been scalded.

'Hallowed! how hallowed! In what way is it hallowed! What are you saying, Sir? It's unclean! It's damned! . . . Hallowed earth? . . . You must not talk like that, Sir, you ought to

be ashamed! Is earth hallowed, which never thaws? This earth is cursed! God doesn't wish human beings to live here; it wouldn't have been like this, if He had wished it. Cursed! Bad! Damned! Damned!'

And he began to spit about him, and stamp his feet, threatening the innocent Yakut earth with tightened lips and his shrivelled hands, and muttering Jewish maledictions. At last, exhausted by the effort, he fell rather than sat down at the table beside me.

All exiles, without regard to religion or race, dislike Siberia: evidently a fanatic does not learn to hate it half-heartedly. I paused until he had calmed himself. Educated in a severe school, the Jew quickly regained his self-possession and mastered his emotion, and when I gazed questioningly into his eyes the next moment, he immediately answered me:

'You must pardon me; I do not speak of this to anyone, for to whom should I speak here?'

'Then are there very few Jews here?'

'Those here? Do you call them Jews, Sir? They're such low fellows, not one of them keeps the Law strictly.'

Fearing another outburst, I would not, however, allow him to finish, and decided to change the conversation by asking him straight out what he wanted to talk to me about now.

'I should like to know the news from there, Sir. I have been here so many years, and I have never yet heard what is going on there.'

'You are asking a good deal, for I can't exactly tell you everything. I don't know what interests you,—politics perhaps?'

The Jew was silent.

I concluded that my present guest, like many of the others, was interested in politics; but as I myself did not understand the very elements of the subject, I began to give the stereotyped account I had already composed with a view to frequent repetition of the situation of European politics, our own,[1] and so forth. But the Jew fidgeted impatiently.

'Then this does not interest you?' I asked.

'I have never thought about it,' he answered candidly.

'Ah, now I know why you have come! I am sure you wish to know how the Jews are doing, and how trade is going?'

'They are better off than I am.'

'Exactly. I am sure, under the circumstances, you will wish to know if living is dear with us, what the market prices are, how much for butter, meat, etc.'

'What does it concern me if it is ever so cheap there, if I can get nothing here?'

[1] *I.e.* Polish.

'Quite right again; but what the devil did you actually come here for?'

'Since I don't know myself, I ask you, Sir, how I am to tell you? You see, Sir, I often get thinking . . . I think so much . . . that Ryfka (that's my wife) asks, "Srul, what's the matter with you?" And what can I tell her, for I don't know myself what it is. Perhaps some people would laugh at me?' he added, as if fearing I were amongst them.

But I did not laugh; I was interested. Something, the cause of which he himself could not explain or express in words, was evidently weighing on him, and his unusually poor command of language added to this difficulty. In order to help him I re-assured him by telling him that I was in no hurry, as my work was not urgent and there would therefore be no harm in our having an hour's talk, and so on.—The Jew thanked me with a glance, and after a moment's thought opened the conversation thus:

'When did you leave Warsaw, Sir?'

'According to the Russian calendar, at the end of April.'

'Was it cold there then or warm?'

'Quite warm. I travelled in a summer suit at first.'

'Well, just fancy, Sir! Here it was freezing!'

'Then you have forgotten, is that it? Anyway,

with us the fields are sown in April, and all the trees are green.'

'Green?' Joy shone in Srul's eyes. 'Why, yes, yes—green :—and here it was freezing!'

Now at last I knew why he had come to me. Wishing to make certain, however, I was silent: the Jew was evidently getting animated.

'Well, Sir, you might tell me if there is any—with us now . . . but you see, I don't know what it's called; I have already forgotten Polish,' he apologized shyly, as if he had ever known it—'it's white like a pea blossom, yet it's not a pea, and in summer it grows in gardens round houses, on those tall stalks?'

'Kidney beans?'

'That's just it! Kidney beans! Kidney beans!' he repeated to himself several times, as if wishing to impress those words on his memory for ever.

'Of course there are plenty of those. But are there none here?'

'Here! I have never seen a single pod all these past three years. Here the peas are what at home we should not expect the . . . the . . .'

'The pigs to eat,' I suggested.

'Well, yes! Here they sell them by the pound, and it's not always possible to get them.'

'Are you so fond of kidney beans?'

'It's not that I am so fond of them, but they are so beautiful that . . . I don't know why . . .

I often get thinking and thinking how they may be growing round my house. Here there's nothing!'

'And now, Sir,' he recommenced, 'will you tell me, if those small grey birds are still there in the winter,—like this—' and he measured with his hand. 'I have forgotten their names too. Formerly there were a great many, when I used to pray by the window. They used to swarm round! Well, whoever even looked at them there? Do you know, Sir, I could never have believed that I should ever think about them! But here, where it's so cold that even the crows won't stop, you can't expect to see little things like that. But they are sure to be there with us? They are there, aren't they, Sir? . . .'

But I did not answer him now. I no longer doubted that this old fanatical Jew was pining for his country just as much as I was, and that we were both sick with the same sickness. This unexpected discovery moved me deeply, and I seized him by the hand, and asked in my turn:

'Then that was what you wished to talk to me about? Then you are not thinking of the people, of your heavy lot, of the poverty which is pinching you; but you are longing for the sun, for the air of your native country! . . . You are thinking of the fields and meadows and woods; of the little songsters, for whom you could not spare a

moment's attention there when you were busy, and now that these beautiful pictures are fading from your recollection, you fear the solitude surrounding you, the vast emptiness which meets you and effaces the memories you value? You wish me to recall them to you, to revive them; you wish me to tell you what our country is like? . . .'

'Oh yes, Sir, yes, Sir! That was why I came here,' and he clasped my hands, and laughed joyfully, like a child.

'Listen, brother . . .'

And my friend, Srul, listened, all transformed by listening, his lips parted, his look rivetted to mine; he kindled, he inspired me by that look; he wrested the words from me, drank them in thirstily, and laid them in the very depth of his burning heart . . . I do not doubt that he laid them there, for when I had finished my tale he began to moan bitterly, 'O weh mir! weh mir!' He struck his red beard, and in his misery tears like a child's rolled fast down his face . . . And the old fanatic sat there a long time sobbing, and I cried with him . . .

Much water has flowed down the cold Lena since that day, and not a few human tears have rolled down suffering cheeks. All this happened long ago. Yet in the silence of the night, at times of sleeplessness, the statuesque face of

Bałdyga, bearing the stigma of great sorrow, often rises before me, and invariably beside it Srul's yellow, drawn face, wet with tears. And when I gaze longer at that night-vision, many a time I seem to see the Jew's trembling, pale lips move, and I hear his low voice whisper:

'Oh Jehovah, why art thou so unmerciful to one of Thy most faithful sons? . . .'

IN AUTUMN

WACŁAW SIEROSZEWSKI

THE rain and bad weather, which had continued without interruption for several days, had kept the inhabitants of the hut, 'Talaki,'[1] prisoners indoors, and condemned them to idleness. They constantly went out of the room to gaze long and sadly at the weeping sky, for the hay was rotting in the fields;—but alas! a grey film of rain hung over all the surrounding country, and in vain their eyes sought longingly for the smallest chink of blue in the heavy, dark clouds.

To add to the misfortune, the rain, not content with the holes left in the roof from the year before, made a number of fresh ones. It thus poured into the room from all sides on to people's heads and shoulders, and formed quite a deep and ever-growing pool underfoot. Various forms of filth, remains of food, refuse of fish and game, the dung in the corner where the calves were kept, which had been trodden down and had dried in the course of the year, became moist, and filled the

[1] 'Talaki,' Yakut for 'water-willow.'

interior of the 'yurta'[1] with an unbearable smell. It was therefore stuffy, cold, and damp there. The fire, burning rather slowly, was choked by balls of grey smoke, which went across the room.

The hut was tiny; it occupied no more than twenty-four square yards of the solitude surrounding it. The slanting walls, made of barked larch trees placed perpendicularly, and narrowing towards the top, diminished its size still more. The flat roof was built of rafters of the same wood, and came down so close to the inhabitants' heads that one of them, Michawio, a big lad, while unwinding a bundle of nets at the little window, hit his curly shock head against it.

A plank partition, hewn out with a hatchet, ran through the centre of the room, and divided it into equal parts, the right being for the men, the left for the women. By a post at the end of the room, with his face turned towards the fire, his hands on his right knee, and smoking a pipe, sat my host, Kyrsa,[2] a Yakut. Still hale, though no longer young, he was the wealthy and independent master of field labourers, and the owner of the house, of many nets, animals, and implements, as well as of three women:—a wife, and two daughters. The youngest was sold already, but she was living with her father, as the sum agreed

[1] 'Yurta' = Yakut hut.
[2] 'Kyrsa' = white fox.

upon for her had not yet been paid in full by the buyer.

There was deep silence in the room,—a rather unusual thing in a place where several Yakut people are together. The fire roared and hissed in the chimney, and behind the partition the girls made a squeaking sound as they rubbed the skins together. I had a foreboding that this silence would end badly; indeed, the storm soon broke out. The lad nicknamed ' Shmata ' brought it on by his incompetence. After wandering from corner to corner all day, he now upset a bucket and spilt the water. This was the last straw. All eyes flashed, and faces grew pale.

The frightened Shmata tried to lay the blame on Michawio, who had been stooping down near him to look for a strap. Michawio in revenge reminded Shmata of what had happened about the rake the year before. The quarrel had begun in earnest. Their tongues, moving with the speed of a windmill, and throwing out invectives and sneers, formed an accompaniment to the host's threatening shouts, which rang out like the trump of the Archangel. Nor did our hostess fail to leave her seclusion to take part in the skirmish with the excitement peculiar to women all the world over. The yurta suddenly became like a disturbed beehive. The host affirmed, the hostess denied, the labourers hurled abuses at one another,

the girls uttered war cries, the baby woke up and screamed in its cradle, and the calves lowed in answer to the loud mooing of the cows, whom evening had driven near the house door. This last occurence had a perceptible influence in diminishing the noise, for it caused the female element to withdraw from the fight; in fact, the disturbance might have been conjured away completely, if the happy thought of adding something at the very moment when everyone else was quieting down, had not entered our host's head.

This remark burst out unexpectedly, like a belated bomb after a battle, and produced such a din that the cows and calves were silent, the wind abated in fright, the clouds fled, and I became aware of a golden sunbeam penetrating the holes in the bladder at the window, and falling suddenly into the interior of our dark, dirty, noisy hovel. Merrily and brightly it rested in a shining circle on the closely cropped grey head of my host, before whose nose his wife's large closed fist was hovering at that moment. 'That's for you! Take that! Go on!' Kuimis cried, still beautiful in her anger. The fist came closer and closer to the unfortunate man's mouth.

What happened further? Did Kyrsa avenge himself like a man for that greatest of all insults possible to a Yakut from a woman? Or did he show himself to be the 'wife of his wife,' an old

woman and a simpleton, as the neighbours called him, and refrain from knocking out the teeth or breaking the ribs of the active woman by whose work he lived and had grown rich? I do not know, because, foreseeing the overthrow of my friend, in whom love for his wife was always struggling against a sense of duty, and not wishing to be a witness of his defeat, I shouldered my gun and went out of the cottage.

The wind had dropped, the covering of clouds was torn open, and bits of pale blue sky were unveiled here and there. The sun peeped out suddenly through one of these little gaps, and the landscape, which had been dreary and joyless a moment before, brightened into a golden splendour. A light shadow, half cheerful, half sombre, fell across its faded autumn foliage, and in this half smile it resembled a forsaken woman, to whom the caprice of a lover, who has already grown cold, offers a moment of tenderness and happiness again. Drops of rain glistened like brilliants on the dark branches of the trees and bushes; the sky was coloured in shades of carmine, and the pearly tears of the passing storm trembled on the willows, still swaying from it.

Before me, between two high promontories overgrown by woods which ran in opposite directions, sparkled the surface of the lake. In proportion as it stretched into the distance, its

bank became more winding, lower, and mistier, until it disappeared at the outlet of a gorge. Owing to the distance, the tall, thin larches, the thick willows, bushes, and grass growing there looked quite small, but the rays of the sunset, falling on them from behind, produced a wonderful lace-work of dark branches and leaves against a pale-rose sky. Grey clouds hung above them, heavily embroidered with gold and purple. The waves sported and chased one another below on the foam-splashed banks of the lake, which was painted with colours from the sky.

I walked towards the gorge, by the footpath leading through a meadow which was now turning yellow.

That 'demons' forest'[1] looked dark and horrible close at hand. The flat hills, uniformly covered with soft moss of a dirty green, and with cranberry leaves, undulated gently westwards towards the sinking sun. The wood covering these hills was sparse and stunted, and disfigured them rather than otherwise, for single trees stood out here and there like the remaining hair on a bald man's head. Silence, and the gloom of oncoming night already filled the interior of the forest. Only here and there a forgotten ray of sunshine was burning itself out above in the bare, wind-twisted summits of the larches.

[1] Native name for this forest.

I stood for a moment, looking at that wild spot, which no native would have dared to approach. A deep stillness lay upon it; the waves beat more and more gently and noiselessly; the sunset was fading away, and only where the network of bushes was less close a transient gleam lighted the surface of some lakes, which had hitherto been unknown to me. I walked on towards them, impelled by curiosity and a feeling of longing.

The way proved more difficult than I had expected. At every moment I was obliged to jump or climb over bushes and avoid the deep, narrow wells, boarded round with tree-trunks felled a hundred years before and perfidiously concealed by the mosses and plants overgrowing them. As these wells were full of water, with bottoms as slippery as ice, an unwary pedestrian could easily break his neck or fracture a leg by falling into them. In many places swampy streams trickled along undefined channels, and though their banks were shallow, they were boggy and difficult to cross on account of the trunks and branches lying in them. The wood was full of trees with projecting, mud-covered roots, which now, when everything was assuming an indefinite shape in the twilight, looked twisted and monstrous. The white patches of lichen shining in the darkness at the foot of the trees like the immense shreds

of a pall, emphasized and doubled their weird appearance. It is, therefore, no wonder that in the purple light of dawn, or in the moonlight, the natives should here see the tall wood-demon's pale face,—the Slav hunter who came from the South and now roams near the Yakut cottages, injuring cattle.

Woe to the district where his shadow passes! Often from fifty to two hundred beasts fall dead at one shot from those terrible Southern arms.

That evening, however, I met none of these inhabitants of the wood. I also did not see the 'demons,'—the dry Tungus corpses. At one time they were to be found here quite frequently, and the forest takes its name from them. Shrivelled and horrible, they usually sit somewhere under a tree or cleft in a rock, gazing eastwards with eye-sockets pecked by the birds. On their knees they hold a wooden bow, or a rifle, at their feet lies a hatchet with a broken handle, and at their belt, inlaid with silver and beads, hangs a broken knife in its sheath,—also broken, in order to prevent the dead man from doing any mischief after death. A little to one side lie scattered the bones of the reindeer, killed on his grave, the harness, and the small Tungus sledge. No one ever dares to possess himself of any of these considerably valuable articles, for punishment threatens the foolhardy, inasmuch as he loses his

way all day long until he returns to the same place and restores the stolen object. Until they give ample satisfaction, and atone to the angered owner by a gift, obstinate people return some thirty, even a hundred times without being able to escape from the magic circle. It is dangerous even to touch any of the things belonging to the dead man, since that evokes a storm, or, at best, a high wind. Although the kindly natives had advised me to avoid meeting with the 'demon,' since it brings early, and sometimes immediate death, I was very sorry not to have seized him red-handed that evening. However, I came to be severely punished for this sinful wish.

The twilight deepened. The last purple resplendance had already faded from the sunset, when tired and tattered, I at last succeeded in pushing my way through the bushes of the 'demon's forest.' The sky was dark, and twinkling with myriads of stars. My expedition had failed in every respect. To complete the misfortune, the white mists hung like muslin over the valley, and entirely prevented me from satisfying my curiosity. I was therefore only able to take pleasure in the play of the moonlight.

It was really a beautiful view, although rather wild and gloomy. Nearly the whole of the broad valley, to the very edge of the wood where the dark, bare tree-tops projected beyond the border

of mist, was filled by white balls of vapour; the moon was moving slowly above them. Looking for a moment into the depths of the valley, she drew aside the floating veil, and touched the sleeping lake below with her silvery kiss. I stood a long while to gaze and to rest. The deep silence, the stillness which always reigns in these woods, the knowledge that no one but myself was to be found in that solitude for twenty versts round, filled me with a strange feeling of anxiety and longing. I roused myself in order to dispel this. It was unfortunately time to think of returning;—no easy matter, however, for in making my way through the wood, I had lost a clear conception of the right track. At last I hit on a small footpath, and decided to follow it in the hope that it would lead me to some inhabited spot. I had scarcely gone twenty steps before becoming persuaded that I was not walking on a path, but on one of the numerous tracks made in the wood by water or animals. It was therefore necessary to return to the place from which I had started, for only thence could I more or less trace the way leading in a bee-line through the wood. But the place had disappeared; the night had shrouded it in new and different shadows, and the mist had drawn its silver web across it. I walked for some time, searching in vain, and haunted by the thought of forest madness. I had

seen people brought home from the 'taiga'[1] no longer in possession of their faculties, pale and miserable, and with the traces of terror and madness in their eyes. These unhappy men had often lost their way quite near houses, without seeing them or being able to recognize the points of the compass, although the sun was shining, and they had wandered about, crying and howling like wild animals. After recovering, they said that they had seen the demon. One of the causes of this illness is the fatigue brought on by the strain of the vain search. So I sat down on a felled trunk, resolving to wait for daybreak.

The air was cool. My clothes were wet with the mist and rain, besides being too thin for spending the night in the wood, so that I soon began to suffer from the cold. I tried to light a fire, but the matches were damp, and the only one which burnt could not set fire to the moist brushwood and logs. Having, therefore, gathered some grass, I hid my feet in it, as they were suffering the most from the cold; I examined my gun, and loaded it, and then, crouching against a tree, I tried to go to sleep.

In a situation of this kind every sense is rapidly dulled,—touch, smell, even sight; hearing alone becomes exceedingly acute. After only a few minutes I could hear my heart beating, the blood

[1] 'Taiga' = primeval forest in Siberia.

pouring through my veins, the whisper of the trees, the rustle of the mist, so that the dead silence of the wood was broken in upon by sounds, which, though scarcely audible, continued to increase. Suddenly a very real sound rang out amid these fancied ones, and forced me to open my eyes. It came from the further end of the lake, and was like the measured strokes of an oar. I fixed my eyes on the spot whence it seemed to come. The veil of mist was trembling slightly, and beyond it, in the distance, something indistinct appeared low on the water. After a moment a small Yakut pirogue emerged from the shadows, and sped along the lake. I could perfectly well see the rower squatting in the bottom of the boat, and striking first with one, then with the other blade of his long oar, from the ends of which the water poured in a shining stream, like molten silver.

He soon approached the bank, and drew the boat to land. I crept towards him, hiding in order that he should not see me too soon, and run away, as I knew he would. He was engaged in taking something out of the boat.

'What news?' I greeted him, according to the local custom, coming slowly out of the bushes.

He started and exclaimed, but did not run away, for he recognized me, and I him. He was a poor Yakut, who lived about five versts from me.

'I know nothing! I have heard nothing! Oh, how you did frighten me,—but it's all right!' he said hastily, giving me his hand.

'What did you think it was?'

'Why should one meet a man in the wood at night time?' he answered evasively, eyeing me suspiciously from head to foot. 'You often think it's a man you know, and you talk to him as if you knew him, and then it turns out in the end not to be a man at all.'

'What are you doing here so late?'

'I am going home; it's a holiday to-morrow. I have a long way to go from here to Babylon[1] for fishing,—thirty versts. You know we're poor folk, we live by fishing,—we haven't any horses; so one is always in a boat, always in a boat. As I was dragging it through the wood I cut my foot, so I've got behindhand.'

'You have cut your foot?'

'It isn't much, for I've stopped the bleeding.'

'Then perhaps it was you whistling and calling?' I asked, remembering a strange sound I had heard a moment before.

'I!—No!' He was silent, and I noticed him lean over the boat, and cross himself.

'And what are you doing here?' he asked in his turn.

I hesitated.

[1] A large lake to the N.E. of the Kołymsk district.

'Looking for ducks,' I lied, not wishing to frighten him more.

'Ducks!' he repeated, laughing heartily, and his white teeth shone in the darkness like pearls.

'There have never been any ducks here!'

'Never been any? Why?' I asked, as I helped him to draw the boat along the edge of the wood towards the lake, which could be seen in the distance. The fisherman was limping.

'The lakes are different,' he explained, 'and there are as many lakes in our country as stars in the sky, and the stars are only the reflection of them. The lakes are as different as the stars: —there are large and small ones, and some so deep that you can't reach the bottom; or else they are shallow, or marshy. In one there are fine fish, in another small, in some the water's bad, and makes a man ill, because the cattle go into it, in others again it's as pure as air.'

We halted on the bank, let down the boat into the water, and entered it, the fisherman in front, I behind. Leaning lightly against one another, back to back, we sailed along like a god with two faces of which one was bearded and European, the other flat, clean-shaven, and Mongolian.

The Mongolian face continued its conversation, only interrupting it now and then to give me a warning not to move when the boat rocked too much.

'Everything comes from the water. Even the cow lived in the water until she was taken and tamed by man. There are different kinds of wild beasts and even people living in the water, as there are on land. Now just look!' and he pointed with his oar to the long water-weeds swaying under the passage of the pirogue. 'Isn't that a wood?' It was indeed a wood, dark and mysterious, visited only by fishes and drowned men. Once he had fallen in, no swimmer ever extricated himself from its thickets.

'Old people say,' the Yakut continued, 'that formerly everything was different,—everything was better, because there was more water, and that even the sables used to come up to the farm gates, and there was so much fish that it was enough to shoot an arrow into the lake to draw it back with a good catch. But now there's nothing; the sables have run away, and there isn't much fish. It's only the traders, our fathers, who save us, or we should die. They give the money to pay the taxes, they give tea, tobacco, and cotton. Eh yes! these traders! I'd just like to be a trader!'

The little boat struck the bank. We therefore drew it along to the next lake, and continued the rest of our journey in this manner, this being the sole means of travelling in summer in that country of lakes, marshes, and swampy woods.

After travelling thus for an hour along a narrow stream, overgrown with bulrushes, we ultimately arrived at the last lake. The sparks from a yurta chimney were glittering on its bank in the distance, like tiny red stars.

'I expect you are going to Chachak?' my companion asked, when we stopped on the bank. 'I am spending the night there.'

I took up some of the fisherman's things, and walked towards the yurta. I had known Chachak for some time past already. He was a queer man, who laughed at his own extravagances, and frequently even shocked the feeling of the neighbourhood. 'Chachak has made himself a cap of a whole wolf skin!' I had been told laughingly. 'Chachak has paid the merchants only two roubles for a brick of tea; "they would make too much profit by three roubles," he said!'

'What about the merchants? Did they give it to him?'

'Eh, why, his old woman gave it to them on the sly! Why! You don't know Chachak! He won't give three roubles;—he won't drink, and he won't give that!'

Chachak had been famous in his youth as the best hunter in the district, and wonders were related of his prowess and skill. He preferred bear hunting to any other, and set out to it summer and winter with his spear and gun, killing

in the open field or lair, just as it happened. He was as ready for such encounters as he was for cards. Only let him hear of a bear, and from that moment he had no peace until he had tracked and killed it. Many a time he had been invited to accompany hunters who had found a den with several bears. But burning with the fever for the chase, he had been unable to wait until morning, and had slipped away in the grey dawn with his faithful dog to hasten to the spot, where he was usually to be found, pale and splashed with the blood of the 'forest lords.' There was nothing left for his companions to do but for each to eat a portion of the hard heart and liver of the vanquished, and to drink a cup of blood, shouting the triumphant 'uch!' three times. All eyes would be upon Chachak, who would try to appear indifferent, although excited and feeling the just pride of a hero. Once, moreover, he had killed a bear with a tail, which, as everyone knows, is not a bear, but a devil. Had he not killed the 'icy demon,' who tracked people, carried off cattle, and whom neither bullet nor spear could touch? Chachak himself never spoke or boasted of his victories; he was always modest and reserved, as befits a man who possibly knows more than others. Since the accident which befell him during his last hunt, however, he had been completely changed. He had given up hunting and

playing cards, become poor, and grown morose and strange :—he had lost his influence.

His yurta stood near the bank, so I quickly found myself at its gate. A bright fire was burning within, and voices could be heard talking. So they were not asleep yet ! I went up to the door, and peeped through the chink. Chachak was sitting before the fire, with his face towards me, holding a net which he was not winding, for his hand was stretched slightly in front of him while he related something to the listeners gathered round him. At his feet a small naked child played with the brass chain of a knife hanging in a wooden sheath sewn to his leather trousers above the right shin. Chachak was very animated ; every now and then he bent forward towards his listeners, and stamped his massive heel on the clay floor of the cottage.

' They have a horror of horseflesh, and eat pigs !' he was saying, ' yet a horse is a very clean and sensible animal.'

' Why, yes !' his listeners assented.

' But pigs !—I have seen them ! They're disgusting ! They've no hair ! They're bare, dirty, stupid, and bad tempered ! They've enormous mouths, thin curling tails like snakes, small eyes, and teeth like a dog's. They're spiteful too !—When I was at Yakutsk I had an adventure with the pigs, and they all but ate me. There're lots

of them there. I had gone out by myself in the early morning to finish my pipe in the passage; everyone was still asleep, and it had only just begun to dawn. The pigs were going round the courtyard, squealing. I was young, and liked a joke, so when they ran round me I shook my fist at them. They rushed at me like mad!' He broke off with a laugh. 'I ran along the passage, they after me; I jumped on to a bench, and they came grunting round me, while I kept shaking my fist at them. Ha-ha!'

He spat into his hand, and stretched it out before him.

Suddenly the door creaked. The woman exclaimed, the lads jumped up from the floor, the children began to cry.

'Who's coming? A Russian, perhaps, and pigs with him!' Chachak stopped talking, and drew back his outstretched fist.

The entrance, as is usual in a Yakut yurta, was behind the fireplace, the one source of light in the evening; thus a full minute of fear and anxious expectation passed before I entered from the darkness. Yes, it was a 'Russian,' but a well-known one, a friend, and, into the bargain, without pigs!

Their faces brightened, and they stretched out their hands, welcoming me warmly and frankly, as guests are always welcomed in the North.

Chachak laughed, made room for me on the bench before the fire, and ordered the kettle to be put on.

'Tell us the news, and what is happening,' they begged me.

I began to relate the local news. They all listened attentively, although, as it turned out, they had already long known it. The companion of my night journey entered, and the conversation became general. The men grouped themselves round the table, on which Chachak's wife had set supper for us; freshly made soup, sour milk, and a large pile of fish, dried and smoked.

Chachak stood at the fire, warming his back, and did not join in the conversation. His daughter, a young and rather pretty girl, placed a few white china tea-cups and saucers on the table, and the usual Yakut entertainment began: tea with milk and cold refreshments, followed later by a hot supper with fish. Although the offer of meat was very tempting, and we were rather hungry, we were not equal to tasting all the dishes set before us. Chachak noticed this at once, and attacked me about it with his wonted brusqueness.

'You aren't eating? You've had enough? What's this new fashion of going to pay visits without being hungry? You Slavs eat like birds when you go to people's houses, but you go home

and call out: "Wife, the samovar; put the saucepan on the fire,—I'm hungry." You're disgraceful!'

They all began to laugh, the old man no less than the rest.

A general conversation was started, at first about different countries and customs, but soon reverting to burning local questions.

'What's wrong with Andshay? He's in trouble. There's no trace of his boy.'

'None?'

'A pity! He was a sturdy lad!'

'Have they found nothing?'

'No. All the neighbours have been out to search; they've searched the lakes, they've searched the wood, they've been searching for a whole week. But there's nothing,—nothing.

'Ah!—sure to be a bear. They say one appeared in the valley; Kecherges saw him,' muttered the fisherman, who had arrived with me.

At the word, 'bear,' Chachak, who was standing by the fire, silently playing with his fingers, suddenly looked up. Everyone stopped talking, and involuntarily turned towards him. His old wife nervously tried to change the subject.

'A bear! Where was he seen?' Chachak asked quickly in a low tone, sitting down on the bench.

'Oh! Who can tell? Perhaps it wasn't one either,' the fisherman answered hesitatingly.

'A bear,—depend upon it!' Chachak said slowly. 'They have found neither flesh nor clothes:—"He" usually buries the remains of his prey in the ground,—"He" even scrapes the blood off. That's just what "He" does. You say Kecherges saw "Him?"' he again asked the fisherman.

'Lies!' the latter answered evasively.

'Oh! "He"'s clever, "He"'s sly and revengeful! Andshay must have done something to "Him" in order to be able to boast of it, or to have something to talk about. "He" remembers insults a long time, that's why "He" has carried the boy off. Although "He" lives far away, "He" hears in the mountains and forest quite well what we are saying here, and understands like a man,—better than a man! Who knows what "He" is? Skin "Him," and you will see how like a woman "He" is. But "He"'s revengeful,—and terribly fierce,' Chachak added, looking down. '"He" doesn't forgive!'

'You Russian,'—he turned to me suddenly,—'be ready for "Him" on the road. Take care! Take care! Though a bear is big, "He" can go as quietly as a shadow when "He" wants to fall upon a man unawares. I advise you to stay the night with us; there's no joking with "Him"! Once I was not afraid either, but

now;—there—look!' He undid his shirt sleeve. It was a terrible sight. The left shoulder, which, as I had previously noticed, the old man could make little use of, was shrunk and thin to the elbow, like a mere bone covered with skin, and those veins and muscles which were unscathed, wound round the bone close to the surface. There was a mass of white scars, crossing in different directions.

'I have killed many,—many!' he continued, 'and now I know that they will eat me for it,—eat me because I'm afraid. It happened like this. It was rather later in the season than this; it was freezing. I got ready my spring-gun for elk-shooting, and God gave me one of these big beasts. To have carted its flesh, skin, and inside along a bad road would have needed seven or eight horses. So I decided to build a larder on the spot, and to lay the elk in it for a time, till the road became frozen. I and my boy set out early to work. The lad was lingering a little way behind me, and I was walking quite quietly along the road, and had just passed the willow which grows on the hill not far from here, when "He" came upon me. He ran towards me like a dog, and before I could look round "He" was already standing on his hind-legs. I reached out for my knife, but tried in vain to drag it from the sheath. There was a night frost, and on coming out of

the house I had not wiped my knife, as I should, after eating, so it had frozen to the sheath. It was God's hand !—So the " Black One " knocked me down. Finding myself overpowered, I seized him by the throat with my right hand, and laid the left on his jaws, and called to the boy to run for help. The silly boy jumped on him, and—whack !—went his pocket knife into the bear ;—he had a little knife that size,' and Chachak measured with his finger. ' " You want to eat my father !" he shouted. The Black One was frightened, and jumped into the bushes. But the boy had hit me in the chest with his knife, and I should have been killed, had it been able to pierce the stag's hide. They could scarcely bring me round again.'

' And you see from that time, when " He," sitting on me, looked into my eyes, my mind has been troubled. I am afraid,' he added quietly, ' very much afraid.'

Not long after I took leave of my kind hosts, and went home. The moon was shining brightly, the mist had disappeared, and the well-known foot-path shone white before me. I had gone along it a thousand times without fear or thought of evil, but this time when I neared the place where Chachak had been attacked I involuntarily fingered my knife-handle, and for a moment I seemed to see the monster lying in the shadow

of the bushes, its shaggy muzzle on its outstretched paws.

A few years later I heard that Chachak had disappeared without trace in the wood: the 'forest lords' had doubtless accomplished their revenge.

IN SACRIFICE TO THE GODS

WACŁAW SIEROSZEWSKI

CLOSE to where the river Sheroka issues from a rocky gorge into a broad valley, there is a wooden column, ornamented with carving. At this column, which stands in the middle of a small meadow near the water, the nomad Tungus assemble annually from the neighbouring mountains. Hundreds of reindeer in the midst of a crowd of human beings make a charming picture as the caravans travel thither together. When the merry crowd enters the valley the splash of the river is lost in a ringing echo of voices.

Their camp-fires, scattered in a semi-circle in the wood at the foot of the mountains, twinkle against the background of eternal shadows like a shining girdle, in which the delicate spring green and the grey diaphanous tissue of stems and branches are interlaced.

This is the most agreeable season in the mountain valleys; gnats and other insects have not yet begun to be worrying, the air is delightfully

cool, everything is unfolding and blossoming, and only the winter snow on the summits of the mountains lies untouched by the warmth. The pale, transparent sky above the snow neither darkens at night nor glitters with stars, but shines with the Northern light which joins the sunset of the fading day to the sunrise of the next.

The people remain near the column in the clearing for a whole week. The family elders, grave old men, meet here and discuss their common needs, collect the tribute of hides, and settle all important matters.

But the young men use the time for love and merry-making, dancing and races. The valley rings with laughter and shouting, with the strokes of the hatchet and the echoes of songs; the ground trembles under the cloven hoofs of the furiously driven reindeer; the leather lassoes swish through the air as they are thrown on to the antlers of the animals destined for slaughter. And where work is most active, where life is at its fullest the jingle of the women's glass and silver ornaments is sure to be heard.

So it has been time out of mind. But one year it happened differently.

Numbers of people assembled in the valley, as usual, but the noise of their talking did not drown the roar of the river. The youths did not dance

at the meeting place, no reindeer were to be seen racing. There was no laughter, no singing.

Nor did the counsels take place in common. The men assembled in small groups in separate tents, with a dull look on their sad faces. They talked without animation; jokes and laughter, so beloved by the Tungus, were checked by a general sense of depression, and only rarely indulged in.

However, they did not disperse, but waited impatiently for the coming of old Seltichan, without whom they would not have dared to have settled any important matters. But the old man did not arrive.

'The old man doesn't come, he doesn't come,—and he won't come,' muttered one of the group, sitting among his companions, who were circling round the fire. He was a stout man of possibly fifty years of age, unlike a Tungus, and dressed like a Yakut, with a silver Yakut belt. He had the puffed-up air of a rich man knowing his own importance. 'Who cares to visit the dying?' he added, sulkily.

'*You* didn't try to escape your fate,' gloomily answered a poorly dressed old man, as tawny as copper, and as wrinkled as moss, who was sitting on the opposite side of the fire.

'That is true!' a third repeated. 'You don't try to escape, you don't hide. Didn't I run away, didn't I hide? And what came of it?' and, with

emotion, he began for the hundredth time to relate the story of his misfortune. Each time it was received with equal attention.

'When the news of the disaster came I was on the summit of Bur-Janga, and was just getting ready to go down; but I hesitated, and delayed my start. For a long while the God had mercy on me;—I know that!—till one night I awoke terrified, with a beating heart. I listened:—I heard what seemed like a shot, and loud calling. I drew my head from under the cover, and again I seemed to hear a noise in the wood, like distant shooting. The dogs whined and howled, as if they had noticed a bear. I went out of the tent, and looked. The moon was shining, and an immense shadow passed into the wood from the bottom of the valley, avoiding the hills. The dogs fell at my feet, and I covered my eyes with my hand, unable to look. My heart beat in my breast like a frightened bird, my feet were rigid with terror.'

'O-oh!' echoed the sighs of the listeners.

'And what happened next?—A hundred reindeer fell dead at once. Not waiting for dawn, we pushed on that very night. We fled, not halting anywhere, but our herds became smaller every day. So I divided them, and sent them in three directions; yet in a few day's time my son,—and later my daughter,—returned empty-handed.

Then I made up my mind to flee to the end of the world, where no one ever goes. But is there a place anywhere, to which no one has ever yet been? I took nothing belonging to the dying animals, not even the halters; I left everything. And when the leader fell I did not even take the figured band from his head, which had come down to me from my ancestors.'

'A-ah!' responded the listeners.

'The women burst into tears at that,' he continued, encouraged by the sympathy of his audience, 'but the Russian traders had advised it. "Take none of His offering, Brother; He seeks out His own, and will find it everywhere!" So I obeyed; I left it and fled. At last I had gone so far that I grew frightened myself:—may be no one had ever been there before me. There were no trees anywhere, not even bushes,—only the same rocks and snow everywhere,—and the gale. It was impossible to pitch a tent for want of poles, and I was afraid to send to the wood for them, so we dug out a hole in the snow under a rock, and settled ourselves in it. We were comfortable there, and began to be cheerful once more, for the plague ceased. One day passed,—a second,—and none of the reindeer had sickened. We waited in the silence of fear; we not only avoided talking, but even thinking about "Him," for possibly "He" too would forget us! We

did not allow the reindeer out of our sight, and we went where they led us, spending the night among the herd, like the Chukchee. In this way some time passed. My wife was already beginning to be cheerful, and I myself thought that all would be well, and we should grow richer after a while. But again I suddenly awoke in the night, torn by anxiety. The moon was shining as on that other night, and everything was bright and still all round. The tired reindeer were sleeping in a heap in the snow. But a shadow hung in the air, falling independently, and not from a rock.'

Again the listeners responded with sighs.

'I slipped out of bed cautiously, took my gun, and without dressing, began to steal, naked, towards "Him." "He" did not notice me, for "He" was standing on a rock, taking stock of what I possessed. But when I made a slight sound as I was hurriedly taking aim, "He" turned and fixed "His" great burning eyes on me. I shot between them. What happened afterwards I do not know. Did "He" hit me, or cover me with "His" breath? I have no idea.

'Something like a storm passed over me; but when I regained consciousness I had not a single reindeer left;—Tumara was a poor man.'

The speaker was silent, waved his hand, and starting to his feet, stood with bowed head, and

an expression of pain on his face. The young men in the audience also stood up; but the old men did not stir from their seats, and fixing their eyes on the speaker, waited for the continuation of the story.

'Well,—and then—?'

Tumara raised his head and began to speak, but at that moment his look fell beyond the edge of the circle and became absorbed in the distance, his face showed astonishment, his lips trembled, and tears rolled from his eyes. Everyone at once turned in the same direction.

At some distance from the fire, and leaning against the back of a reindeer as white as milk, stood a grey-headed Tungus in the old-time national costume. Behind him, holding a riding-reindeer by the bridle, was a young boy resembling him in face and dress.

'Seltichan!' they all cried, 'you have come at last,—you!—our father! We thought that you had forsaken us, who are dying! What news? What have you heard and seen beyond the mountains? How fare the people of Memel? Are they living still? Or are they, perhaps, also drawing their last breath, as we are? And you, our leader, what do you mean to do? Have you come alone, or with all your people? Are you going back to the mountains? Or are you going to the coast?' The questions came pouring out.

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Giving the bridle to his son, Seltichan joined the circle round the fire, and greeted everyone singly by a shake of the hand. He sat down beside the Kniaź,[1] dressed like a Yakut, who hastily made room for him. Then, pulling a small Chinese pipe out of his tobacco-pouch, he filled it slowly. The group became silent, and sat down again.

'It is now two months since the plague reached its height,' the old man answered in a calm, grave voice. 'The people of Memel have dispersed terrified and fled to the coast, but by different ways, in order to avoid the dangerous place. You need not expect them here. But my camp will arrive this evening.'

'Ah! Seltichan, who would ever doubt that you would come? You are wise, you are daring, you, we know, fear nothing!' the Kniaź cried, stretching out his hand towards his neighbour's lighted pipe.

A shadow stole over the old man's face.

'No one can escape his fate,' he replied coldly.

'But you were born to happiness, Seltichan! Does not the God love you? When whole herds were dying everywhere, did you not merely lose a young calf?'

Again a cloud came over the old man's face.

[1] 'Kniaź': Russian 'Soltys' = village mayor.

'He loves me because I keep the ancient customs. My welfare does not spring from human tears, but the mountains, the rocks, the woods, and water bring it me,' the old man remarked drily.

His hearers caught up his words.

'Yes, indeed! Your hand was open; you supported your people in the day of disaster, and shared in it.'

'Yet who can help more easily than you?' said the Kniaź. 'What can I give, for example, I, who have only goods for sale, and debts? Should I distribute my debts in these hard times? It is true, I have nothing against that! Yet I too am a Tungus;—what would anyone gain from my accursed debts? They don't breed reindeer,' he ended, laughing.

'Yes, indeed! We should die without you, Seltichan! Who supports us? Whose herds are larger than yours? Who has a better heart? What family is more distinguished and richer? Whose sons are more skilled shots, and finer huntsmen? Whose daughters, when grown-up, most attract our youths? Are you not the first among us,—you who neither suffer nor fear, never lie, and never deceive as we do, and bow to your fate? You, Seltichan! And to whom shall we go, if you will not have pity on us?' came from all sides.

'The God knows, I will share with you! That is why I am here!' the old man answered, touched.

'Tumara! Tumara!' the Kniaź cried, seeking the story-teller, 'finish your tale. You will see, Seltichan, what happens later.'

Silence prevailed again. Tumara, who was sitting in the front row of the councillors, stroked his right ear with his right hand, and began after a moment's pause.

'I have told you already how, having lost the reindeer, we took our goods and our children on our backs, and returned to the valley. Our children became ill, and soon died from eating bad meat, which made us weak too. But what can a hunter find in the wilderness at a time like that?'

'What, indeed?'

'Very soon we were entirely without food. We had eaten all our stores, leather bags, and old thongs, and the women's greasy scarves; there was nothing left that could have a taste. Do not we, who encamp on the mountains, know what hunger is? And was Tumara wanting in courage?'

'He was famous for it!' the listeners asseverated.

'But it happened thus, nevertheless;—we had been many, and only four were left,—I, my wife, my son, and daughter. We went on, always

longing for the sight of human faces. We halted at all the known spots and ancient resting places, and everywhere found the cold ashes of fires :— the people had fled, scattered by the danger. And our wanderings took us ever further from them.

'But when, on coming down from the mountains, we saw bare tent poles, all our courage forsook us. Notwithstanding, we went on further and never stopped searching, for it is not an easy thing for a man to lie down and die in the snow without giving any account of himself.—We scraped the rubbish, and turned over the wet ashes of the cold fires to find a morsel of food, stilling our hunger by knawing the bones left by the dogs. At last it came to this that we could not look at our own children, full of flesh and warm blood, without trembling. "Tumara, let the girl die to save her parents," my wife said at last. I was sorry for the child. She looked at us, not understanding. "Tala," her mother said to her, "according to the old custom, when the family is in danger, the daughter dies first."'

'That is so!' the listeners affirmed.

'"Go, Tala,"' she said, "wash in the snow, and look at the world for the last time." The girl understood and tried to escape, but I held her; so she cried and begged: "Wait till the evening, perhaps the God will send something, I want to live; I am afraid!" So we waited and

watched. The girl was continually going out of the tent, and looking towards the wood, shading her eyes with her hand. But each time her mother was behind her, hiding a knife in her sleeve. It had already begun to be dusk. The girl went out oftener and each time stood longer on the threshold, while I lay in the shade of the tent, waiting to see what would happen. Suddenly I heard a cry outside, which froze my heart. My wife came in with the knife in her hand, staggering like a drunken woman. "Have you killed her?" "No, the God has had pity," she said, "there is a large elk running into the wood close by here!" I jumped up and ran out of the door with my son. The girl was sitting by the tent with outstretched arms, while not far off in the wood stood a large elk.—'

'Stood a large elk!' the listeners repeated.

'Is it difficult for a hunter to kill an animal grazing? But my limbs were dried up with hunger, my muscles weak with pain, and as I stole towards my prey my hands shook so much I could scarcely keep the gun in my hands. But when the animal had been hit, and tried to escape into the bushes, we dashed after it like wolves. And thus the God helped us;—we remained alive in order to die to-morrow.'

Tumara ceased speaking, and bowed his head, again stroking his right ear with his right hand.

The listeners were silent. In that moment of strained attention they seemed to hear the splash of each individual wave in the river, the swish of each branch in the wood, as it rocked in the gale. Suddenly another sound rang out distinct from these continuous sounds, making all faces brighten, and all heads turn in the direction whence it came.

Young Miore, Seltichan's son, bent down to his father, and whispered:

'Father, our people are coming!'

'Yes, they are coming!'

The train was actually approaching.

The old men remained seated, but the young ones slipped out of the circle one after another, and assembled in groups at the edge of the bushes, whence the whole procession, appearing at the rocky outlet to the valley, could be better seen.

A young girl rode in front on a dark yellow reindeer. Her clothes were richly ornamented with silver, a fact which at once suggested that she was a great favourite in her family. She held a long spear in her hand, and wore a band, embroidered with beads, on her loose hair. As she rode along, she cleared her path by cutting away the twigs and gnarled branches which might catch from behind on the packsaddle or her clothing. When she raised her spear the

sunbeams played on the edge of its steel surface in a fiery gleam, and hovered over her head for a moment like a will-o'wisp; then, passing along her shining silver scarf, they fell on her right hand, and finally faded away in the grass of the river-islands.

'Choka! Chogai!' the charming girl exclaimed. She was accompanied by two black dogs, which kept running ahead, and then turning back to examine and sniff at everything, leaving nothing unnoticed. Following her in a long line came the laden reindeer, some of which were being ridden by women, and children who were tied on to the top like tight bundles.

At the very end of the caravan two armed huntsmen, aided by dogs, drove a herd of unladen reindeer with their calves. The noise, clatter, and bustle, the frightened calling of the cows seeking their calves which had gone astray in the confusion, the jingle of bells, the rattle of clappers hanging from the necks of the animals in front, the cries of the men calling to the herd or keeping it in order,—all this whirlpool of seething, exuberant life filled the valley with a resounding echo, and fell on the ear of the listener as a great familiar song of the happiness and well-being of a free nomad existence.

The spectators' eyes glistened. Unable to restrain an outburst of feeling, they began to

describe the impressions made upon them by the scenes and faces passing by like fleeting shadows.

'See, there is old Nioren!'

'What an energetic old woman!'

'Formerly all the Tungus women were like that.'

'So they say—'

'Look how cleverly she manages her reindeer.'

'That's one good thing, but they say that she bore a son to Seltichan not long ago, and that's better still.'

'There's nothing wonderful in that; Majantylan's wife is older, and she also bore—'

'Hush! Look, there is Sala, the old man's daughter-in-law, about whom they sing songs.'

'But is she not worthy of them?'

'Yes, indeed!'

'You may chatter away, but if Miore hears you, he will give it you!'

'What can he do to us? I am not afraid of him.'

'Look,—look!—Laubzal!—Zleci!'

'Actually!—What a wild reindeer!—They needn't have put a little boy on it!'

'He's a plucky lad! Look!—The old man will be delighted with him!'

'And Chun-Me!'

'Ah! Chun-Me! Chun-Me!' several sighed,

their glances seeking the girl with the steel-coloured fringe on her head.

'They say that the Kniaź wants to win her for his son.'

'Eh, the old man won't give him his favourite daughter,—not he!'

When Seltichan's eldest son rode by,—a famous hunter, commonly known by the name of 'Sparkling Ice,'—conversation was hushed out of respect to him.

And when the last reindeer of the caravan had disappeared into the bushes, and the branches closed swinging behind it, Seltichan rose from his seat and went away, taking leave of the company with a slight nod. This was to indicate that he was expecting them all to come to him shortly.

That evening there was a crowd round the old man's tent, for nearly all the temporary inhabitants of the valley were present. The host gave orders for several reindeer to be killed, and welcomed his guests. With the light-heartedness of true Tungus, they forgot their sufferings in satisfying their hunger after their long fast, and began to dance and join in cheerful songs.

The old men sitting by the fire watched the younger ones with enjoyment, and beat time with their heads, repeating the refrains.

'What do you think, Oltungaba, will the God

withdraw his punishing hand, and allow joy to return to the mountains?' Seltichan asked, turning to one of the guests, the old man who was as dark as copper, and as wrinkled as moss.

'Our life, Seltichan, is a shadow falling upon the water,' Oltungaba answered meditatively.

* * * * *

The following morning the people in the valley awoke in an unusually solemn mood. The day proclaimed itself rich in events. The weather was exquisite, the sky clear and blue, without a trace of cloud.

Having assembled at the conference, the older and prominent members of families took their places in the front row, the younger ones behind them, and the women and children still further off, beyond the edge of the circle. Oltungaba, yielding to numerous entreaties, walked into the centre, and bowing, said:

'Why do you ask this of me, regardless of my old age?'

'To whom else can we turn?'

'There are distinguished shamans who are younger.'

'Oh, Oltungaba, who would dare to prophesy in your presence?' was asked from all sides.

The old man was silent, and looked distrustingly at the excited assembly.

'You hesitate,—when, maybe, the last day has come for many?'

'I am not thinking of myself, but calling to mind the ancient customs. Who will interpret my language to you? A difficult time demands a difficult language, and a painful time a painful language. And why arouse danger unnecessarily? If no brave man is found, must I die?'

'Let us all die! Surely, Oltungaba, you wish us well? We are resolved.'

'Then let is be so,' he assented, after a short moment's thought.

Two of the most famous shamans offered him a shaman's cloak with the long fringe, and a number of metal amulets and musical instruments. Then they smoothed out the old man's hair, and placed a horned iron crown on his head. An elderly Tungus, in attendance on the shaman, was drying a drum at the fire meanwhile. When perfectly dry and taut, he tested its elasticity by a blow with a small mallet. The well-known mournful sound stirred the echoes of the valley, and interrupted the talking. A white reindeer skin, with the head turned towards the south, was then spread in the middle of the circle. The old man sat down on it, and lighting his pipe, swallowed the smoke, and washed it down with water. Then he poured out the rest of the water to the four quarters of the globe, and turning

his face to the sun, fell into a state of complete torpor. He sat thus for a long while with bowed head, his hair falling into his eyes, and his look fixed on the blinding white of the mountain tops. At length a shiver ran through his body, followed by a violent sob. The shivering and sobs increased by degrees until they passed into incessant convulsions and groans, in part feigned, in part real. The spectators could be heard sobbing also.

An old woman dropped down in a fit.

At the same moment a fleeting, dark shadow fell on the ground close to the shaman: an eagle was hovering between him and the sun. A piercing cry rent the air, and the people bent like grass before the gale.

Who cried? The shaman or the eagle?

No one knew.

'It is bad, it is bad,' the people murmured.

'Hush!'

The drum sounded several times with a deep and mournful echo, as the crowd was frightened into silence.—The eagle flew away into the distance.

Once more there was stillness, interrupted only by the shaman's muttering. After a while isolated sounds, coming, as it seemed, from the distant wood and depths of the mountain clefts, began to mingle, like the murmur of a swarm of bees, or the twitter of birds calling to one another.

Then Oltungaba shook his bells. By degrees these sounds grew louder, and came nearer, until they passed away in the roar of the waterfall and the splash of the rain which was now falling in torrents. Yet deep and painful sighs, repeated more and more frequently, could be heard above the rush of the water. Oltungaba suddenly raised the drum above his head. Trembling violently, and covered with the pelting hail, he began to utter frightened sounds, like a sheep chased by a wolf. Then, all at once, throwing his hand into the soft reindeer skin, he became silent, but continued to tremble.

'Oh, Goloron!' the shaman groaned, hiding his face with his hands.

And there was stillness once more. Nothing was heard but the shaman's sobs and indistinct mutterings, accompanied by the beating of the drum. Above these sounds rose the intermingled cries of eagles, hawks, crows, and lapwings, which appeared to be circling in flights round the mountain tops. Their shrieking and cawing alternated with the shaman's unintelligible incantations. It almost seemed as if they foresaw some dreadful event, and were hastening to bring news of it in advance to the lords of the äerial world.

By degrees the incantations became more distinct, the words more intelligible, till finally the

first strophe of a chant burst from the shaman's lips.

'Do ye hear the roar of the sea?'

'Ah yes!' answered the attendant.

'I who am the first in creation—'

'Verily,' the attendant replied.

'I, the first among the chosen—'

'In truth,' the attendant repeated.

'Let them come blazing, like the shield of the sun!'

'Let them come!'

'He himself like the clouds,—the fiery raven precedes him—'

'Riddles for a child!'

'Riddles for a child!'

'I am thy son. I, wretched one, walking the earth, implore thee!'

'I implore!'

'Aid my weak strength in this stony path.'

'Oh, aid!'

'Oh, drum, my herald, and wind, my wings!'

'Aye, verily—'

'I approach you, encircled by winged and restless—'

'Winged and restless—'

'Their claws are open, their throats are extended—'

'Extended—'

'The mountains groan, the earth trembles within—'

'Ah!—'

'And I go ever fearfully, yet unhindered—'

'Protect me, my lord, I cry to thee—'

'For I am from the suffering nation!'

'I am indeed.'

'Mighty helper, angry, threatening saviour, have pity!'

'We pray!—'

'If I err, let me not perish on the pathless track!'

'Let me not!'

'Save the erring, lead me.'

'We go—'

Growing more and more animated, the old man stood up, and began to dance.

The dance resembled a march. The shaman described what he met in his path in fantastic language, and by gestures. The attendant followed him, repeating his words, and, at moments, supporting him by the elbow. Thus they came to the edge of the circle. Calmly and solemnly the shaman raised his drum towards the sky in silence, and then sang:

'Thou snake-like Etygar, dwelling in regions below the earth, ruling over the air, sickness, and death itself.—'

'Oh, Etygar!'

'And thou, Iniany, like to a man with huge wings, thou, who shelterest from destruction—'

'Iniany!'

'And thou, Arkunda, endued with the power of second-sight!'

'And thou, Normandaï, whose piercing cry turns the heart to ice!'

'And thou, iron-feathered Wavadabaki! And thou, whom we only know by thy shadow!—'

'I ask what you may require, and what is the cause of your anger? Restrain your ministers, withhold your persecutions. Know ye not that we perish, and if we perish, who will prepare your offering?'

'Who will?'

'To you I come defenceless, entangled in a long cloak. My head is bent with years, my open eyes cannot see far.'

'It is even so!' chimed in the attendant, who had been silent hitherto, not daring to repeat all these awful incantations.

'Going to the sea, and returning to the sea, I am a Nomad—'

'Yea, verily—'

'Ye like dark reindeer, ye like dappled reindeer; have they ceased to be pleasing?'

'Have they ceased?'

'Ha! Ha! Ha! When you dance, do you forget us, and being merry, do you shun us?'

'Is it, perhaps, rich furs, silver, glass ornaments, coloured dresses, sweet cakes, or vodka that you desire?'

'That cannot be!' exclaimed the attendant.

'Fools! Something, were it even everything, must be taken for the powerful!'

'Therefore choose a young girl from among us, and we will dedicate her.'

There was silence.

'Oh, fiery Goloron, feared on the earth, proclaiming—'

Again there was silence.

Oltungaba beat the drum, and the strokes rolled like thunder between the awful words, which, uttered haltingly, seemed to come from a distance.

'They give the scraps to the dogs! Let the people humble themselves, and an obedient man be found; otherwise they will fade like the morning mist.'

'O-oh! How can we possibly give anything, possessing nothing?'

'I will therefore tell you how it was in former days. Let it be he who is proud, he who is rich, whose sons are famed for their shooting, and daughters for their beauty; whom all love, whose thoughts are kind, and counsels wise, whose heart is brave, whose hand is open, whose soul seeks

good. We wish to see the bewildered terror, the pale face, the tears of separation.'

Oltungaba became silent, and let the drum fall.

'No!' he said, after a moment's reflection, 'I will not disclose the name; possibly they may say; "Oltungaba is jealous." Yet what is human blood to me? A shaman needs nothing but his drum.—I have said everything.'

He concluded the rest of the ceremony rapidly, and took his place among the spectators, gloomy and exhausted. Tea was offered to him and the more honoured guests. The young men began to kill reindeer for the others, and to put the cauldron on the fire without delay. Yet none of this was accompanied by the gaiety and animation which usually prevails among the Tungus on such occasions. Those present talked with great restraint, lowering their voices almost to a whisper. They behaved with marked politeness to the family of Seltichan, and took pains not even to look at their host.

Seltichan was as calm and friendly as usual, as if he had not noticed anything, and even tried to start a conversation with Oltungaba. But the shaman preserved a gloomy silence. Then Seltichan began to relate aloud how he had spent that year beyond the mountains, throwing in various hunting anecdotes which he told with so much

humour that he was soon surrounded by cheered and even smiling faces.

Only his favourite son, Miore, who was standing behind him, looked gloomily at everyone.

The frame of mind usual before a meal slowly gained the ascendancy. And when the pieces of savoury meat were taken from the cauldron, everyone had quite forgotten to be sad. Then Seltichan, forsaken by his listeners, became depressed at once, and Miore, watching his father attentively, grew gloomier still.

Unable to restrain himself longer, the lad burst forth angrily to Oltungaba, as he approached: 'I can see that you really want to make away with the old man.'

The latter regarded him with angry surprise.

'You are young and ignorant—'

'But nothing shall come of this,' Miore answered, and withdrew, shaking his head.

This short conversation did not escape other people's attention.

By the end of the banquet Seltichan had regained his usual amiability, as became a host who was entertaining the second day running without regard to his herds. But on returning to his tent he no longer concealed his anxiety, and sat meditatively before the fire, paying no heed to anything; he did not even see the supper his wife placed before him.

'Eat, Seltichan; do not grieve, my lord; I am your faithful servant!' she said at last, shaking him by the shoulder and looking at him affectionately.

The old man turned enquiringly towards his wife, and smiled. He ate heartily and with relish, for, according to Tungus ideas, no event in life is great enough to deprive a fat reindeer of its savouriness.

The following morning Seltichan awoke earlier than the rest, and possibly for the first time since becoming head of the family, he did not stir the half-extinguished fire, but, without waking anyone, quietly escaped from the tent.

The sun was shining, although it had not yet risen above the mountains. The dawn had disappeared, and it was broad daylight. Here and there golden lines bordered the blue shadows of the clefts in the snow-clad mountains. But meanwhile in the valleys, man and Nature were still asleep:—the wood slept, wreathed in mist; the embers glowed faintly on the cool hearths; the reindeer lay on the moss in the bushes, chewing the cud. The only sounds were the gurgle of the river, and the chuckle of the mountain pheasants, which were leaving their hidden roosting places, and flying to the tree tops.

The old man gazed at the familiar valley long and attentively. Suddenly he trembled. He could

see a man standing before one of the tents in the distance; he also seemed to be looking at the surrounding country. Seltichan's keen glance recognized Oltungaba, but the tent, before which he was standing, belonged to the Kniaź. The old man's face clouded, and he went home.

'Get up, children!' he cried. 'Heh! Chun-Me! light the fire! You've had enough sleep for a day like this!'

They all sprang up frightened, and began to busy themselves. The old man looked on with pleasure while the work was silently shared in the order established by centuries. The women put the tea-kettle and cauldron on the fire, and carried the bedding out of doors; the men, after examining their thongs and arms, prepared to go into the wood to call the herd together. The bustle stopped when the tea was ready. They all sat down gravely round a plank serving as table, but as the host was silent, no one dared to talk, although all, not excepting old Nioren, were excited. The young women and girls looked at their father in unspeakable fear. Miore was sad and angry, but 'Sparkling Ice' regarded the old man with respect, not unmixed with a certain degree of curiosity.

After drinking his tea, Seltichan ate something, and lighted his pipe. Then he said to his youngest son:

'Go out, boy, and call the people.'

Miore did not stir from his seat.

'Do you hear?'

Not until the command had been repeated threateningly did the lad rise and begin to buckle on his things. But, instead of going, he suddenly threw himself at his father's feet.

'Are you determined? Are you determined? Oh, father do not leave us! The family will never agree to it. I was talking to the young men yesterday, and they said: "Rather than that, let all our reindeer die, and we will live by industry." But if they do decide on that in the end,—let the fat Kniaź be killed!'

'You are foolish, my boy,' the old man said with a smile. 'You do not know yet what I shall do. I wish to see the people.—Go, I tell you!'

'Oh, my lord, why do you deceive us with hope?'

'Don't talk nonsense.—I have already told you—'

'They will never let us off; it would be better to escape secretly.'

'I have already told you—' the old man repeated obstinately.

'Oh Father, let us escape, let us escape!' they all begged, stretching out their hands towards him. But the old man thrust away Miore, the

most impetuous of them all, with a kick in the chest, and cried:

'Cursed birds of ill-omen, cease from breaking my heart!'

'I would like to know,' said 'Sparkling Ice,' who had been gloomy and silent hitherto, 'why Miore does not obey when our father commands him?'

The lad, who was lying as he had fallen, rose, and left the tent in silence.

* * * * *

Once more the people, from small to great, were assembled at the column in the valley. The armed men were dressed in their best attire,—various kinds of fur, which hung in long fringes. The sun shone on their ornaments as they took their seats in small bands according to families. They amused themselves, wrestled, and in no way betrayed the reason for coming there.

The members of Seltichan's family were distinguished among the rest by their choice arms and rich clothing, as well as by their strength, skill, and the proud independance of their bearing. Seltichan himself, who occupied the seat of honour among them, watched everything that took place with great attention.

'The tribe is enfeebled, and dying out,' he said from time to time. Was it not so with the family

of Tumara? Where is Leljel, who was no less flourishing than we? Where is Nilken?'

'If you leave us, we also shall be enfeebled and dispersed,' his family answered him.

'"Sparkling Ice" will remain after me;—he is not my son, but my comrade!'

The grief of Seltichan's family on hearing this made the old man hesitate as he looked at them.

Meanwhile the excitement prevailing in the assembly increased, and strange rumours were whispered abroad. Somehow it came about that the members of Seltichan's family became more and more isolated from the rest, and were greeted with silence when they approached. Miore and some of the other young men were not disconcerted by this, however, and continued to mix freely with the crowd.

In the evening they all dispersed, but the excitement did not die down, and was only transferred to the tents and the camp fires. People sat talking in low voices until late into the night, alarmed when they saw anything unusual. Several even sharpened their spears. 'A man like that does not die without something happening,' they said.

On the third day they all came fully armed. Many of the young warriors brought their spears with them, and stood leaning on them outside the circle. The deliberations did not begin, but the excited whispers which passed round the crowd

showed the passionate, though restrained, feeling. All eyes were continually turned towards Seltichan, who was sitting splendidly dressed among his sorrowing family, he alone calm and cheerful.

'Shall we allow the old man to cheat us?' whispered several.

'Shall we allow the old man to cheat us?' asked the Kniaź, going from one to the other.

'Well, and what then?' they asked him at one meeting. 'Perhaps you think it will be easier to get hold of the daughter when the old man is not there? You need not expect it; "Sparkling Ice" will never give her to you. He has not forgotten that little affair.'

'What affair? May all my reindeer die, and may I stay in one place to the end of my life, like a Russian in a wooden house, if that is true,' swore the Kniaź. 'Oltungaba is not a man of that sort!'

'Oltungaba drinks vodka!'

The Kniaź became confused, and did not know what to answer at once. 'Idiots!' he finally exclaimed, and stroking both ears, he ran off to carry his complaints elsewhere.

All this increased the excitement, and caused a great deal of talk, which ultimately reached Miore's ears through Seltichan's kinsmen. 'Father, they are deceiving you,' the youth exclaimed passionately, going up to him. 'You are

willing to die, but it is all the doing of the Kniaź; he has bribed Oltungaba! He thinks there will be no one to equal him when you are not here! Father, I beg you, escape quietly. Our tents are struck, the young men are ready, the reindeer saddled; we shall be on the mountains before they have noticed anything. And even should they do so, are we not your children?'

Seltichan's face clouded.

'Let Oltungaba be summoned,—let him be tried!' he cried, rising.

'Oltungaba! Oltungaba!' exclaimed many of Seltichan's family.

'Oltungaba! Oltungaba!' was heard on all sides.

The grey-haired old man entered the circle reluctantly, looking as dark as moss.

'Is it true that you have taken a bribe from the Kniaź? That out of regard to him you have deceived us?' they all cried.

'Wait a little; let one speak! Don't you see that I have only two ears, so that a hundred voices only bewilder me?'

'Then let one speak!'

The head of one of the most distinguished families, who was very highly respected, stepped forward, and sitting down, began to ask questions.

'Did you take bribes?'

'Why shouldn't I take them? Don't I live on men's bounty? Haven't both you and Seltichan given me some too? The Kniaź also gave one, but he didn't ask for anything, and I promised him nothing. Is it not a sin to suspect it? How is it possible to say such a thing? The man will die! Ask his people.'

Witnesses were summoned, and the Kniaź was summoned. They all stood in the centre of the angry circle, looking rather frightened, but the enquiry led to nothing. The only thing that was clear was that Oltungaba had visited the Kniaź in his tent, as he had visited others, and had profitted by his liberality.

Stroking his ears with both hands, and swearing with quite unusual fervour, the Kniaź talked at extraordinary length of his disinterestedness, his merits, his zeal in safeguarding the interests of the tribe with the government, and, above all, of his sacrifices—in paying taxes.

Oltungaba spoke scornfully, and in monosyllables.

'You don't believe me, Seltichan,' he said finally, turning to the old man. 'Have you forgotten how I loved and taught you when you were a boy; how I advised you in difficulties, told you old legends, and about distant countries? Was I not your father's comrade,—his friend when you were still a little child, crawling on the ground?

And later, when you grew up, did I not boast of you, and you, did you not listen to my advice? Who was the foremost warrior and hunter among us? Who spoke wisely and courteously?—You were always a true Tungus, Seltichan; we all know that.—Was it the worst who were offered in olden times? I swear to you, old man, and to all the tribes that I spoke the truth. I said what a voice from heaven commanded me to say! May my face be turned round to my back, and my body dried up like tobacco leaves, may my eyes fall out, and my muscles grow weak like badly dried yarn, and—may my hand burn, as the heart burns from unkindness'—here with a rapid movement he put his hand into the flame.

They all sprang up, and Seltichan drew the old man away from the fire.

'Oltungaba, forgive me, and all of you, forgive me,' he said with emotion. 'It is a sin to suspect evil. I will go,—I had already determined to do so. I am summoned, and I will go. If I stayed, you would be forced to go,—so would it be worth while? There is always one rotten egg in a nest.—Can a man be a man without reindeer? What is a Tungus without other Tungus?—I leave you, but you will not forget me!—Good-bye!—May your herds increase! May your children grow to manhood! May joy not shun your tents! May there be no lack of food in your cauldrons, of

powder in your horns, and of goodness in your hearts !—I go away, but my thoughts are gentle, as the rays of the setting sun.—I am going now ; I take leave of you, my people !—Farewell !'

With a quick movement he tore the figured 'dalys' on his chest, and plunged a knife up to the hilt into his heart.

He stood for a moment, his fading glance passing round them all,—then staggered, and fell.

A single great sigh burst from the crowd.

Oltungaba hastily knelt down beside the dying man, uncovered his breast, and placing his right hand near the wound, stretched his left towards the sun, crying :

'Oh, thou God ruling all things, help us,—shield us ! We are not the last, and not the lowest, if we can send forth hearts like these !'

'Hearts like these !' groaned the crowd.

All, even the stout Kniaź, felt at that moment as if their hearts beat with the same readiness for sacrifice as that which was growing cold under Oltungaba's hand.

'He was a warrior,' whispered the shaman after a moment, and picking up the 'dalys,' he threw it over the face, quivering in its death agony.

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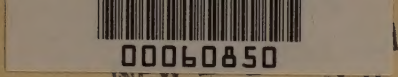
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